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# The New York Review of Science Fiction

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## Barry N. Malzberg The Cloud-Sculptor of Terminal X

**The Stones of Circumstance.** Ballard came from the tradition of the British disaster novel, a lexicon which perhaps predates modern science fiction as we have come to define it. *The Drowned World*, *The Crystal World*, all those sunken empires and bizarre formations are prefaced by Wyndham, Christopher, H. G. Wells... there is something about the ruin of the globe which has always fascinated Ballard's compatriots, perhaps it has something to do with the image of Empire being slowly disentangled, all of the rude colonies coming to storm the consulates at tea time, perhaps it has to do with their ruddy and difficult clime. In any case, the early Ballard novels, short stories too are surprisingly conventional in their background and data fit not precisely in their articulation, they were more precise than *The Minkwich Cuckoos* or *Day of the Triffids*, perhaps, but at the center of it was the same old stuff: it was going to become pictorially, illustratively very bad and Ballard would provide us the maps; it is nonetheless possible to conceive of a literature roughly equivalent to our own without those novels written in the early sixties.

Portents, Egalitarian Shifts. Not so the short stories which from the beginning were distinct, compressed visions of stoned disaster, an egalitarian doom visited upon the poor and rich, the sensibility and insensible alike; in those cracked swimming pools, drained bathtubs, odd, empty cities in which ruined surgical teams or demented astronauts paced out their rounds of denial and circumstance it was possible to see some refraction of the century itself: the machinery of its portents had created a democracy of doom. Still, Ballard was dealing in the apocalyptic, in various versions of games theory, closed cycles and winding down; his landscapes were encrusted with the soft watches and auto-sodomized virgins of early Dali, but blinking beyond these, in the distances beyond the sightlines it was possible to grant a version of perfect peace. Like all of those bomb stories in the *Atomwinding* of the 1940s, a magazine which Ballard read on Army bases for a while until he began to feel that all the contents were the same, Ballard gave us, like Sturgeon, like Chan Davis or Bertram Chandler no clue beyond that perfect garishment of mortality.

Interpolation. Ballard's "The Assassination of JFK Seen as a Downhill Motor Race" is a pastiche of Alfred Jarry's "The Crucifixion as an Uphill Foot Race"; in the Jarry an exhausted but almost debonair Jesus weaving to his outcome, in the Ballard a merry portrait of soldiers on the run, jostling a suicidal JFK who had been looking for something big enough to get him out. "If Oswald was the starter, who fired the gun?" Perhaps the first true Ballard story, the first of them which could have been written by no one else, it passed through every American market to varying reactions of incomprehension or disgust and was published, along with most of the contents of *The Aridity Exhibition*, in *New Worlds*. Several editors questioned not only the taste but the sanity of the author. Jarry had a difficult time as well.

His Toy, His Dream, His Rest. But in "The Terminal Beach," "The Assassination of JFK Seen as a Downhill Motor Race," "The Drowned Giant," Ballard moved beyond his history, voyaged upon his strange and original contribution to the genres of science fiction and literature (held at this time in the 1960s, as they had been for decades

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## In this issue

Barry N. Malzberg combs J. G. Ballard's terminal beach

Ray Davis snips at Bruce Sterling's Bangs

John Clute is inundated by *Stations of the Tide*

Donald G. Keller gets *Moonwise*

Karen Joy Fowler sings the praises of *Carmen Dog*

Hazel D. Schuler and Samuel R. Delany

discuss gender, mentoring, and Wittgenstein

As well as cutting edges, close shaves, the ginger-stint of pubic hair, and a Best of the Year list certain to raise some hackles.

## Ray Davis

### Who's That Banging at My Dori?

I've tried everything, right here in this fucking distribe. I've tried gratuitous insults, scatology, high school flashbacks, plain invective, homicidal fantasy in one instance, and even though I feel good about the latter at least I know that no matter how much I rant things ain't gonna get better till it's time for 'em to. And that time will come, make no mistake, it's never been stopped yet, and when our number comes up we can all get back to the Party in the real way we know it should be: waiting joy from coast to coast just as Martha and the Vandellas prophesied in "Dancing in the Street": "Callin' out, around the world/Are you ready for a brand-new beat?"

And, until it comes, there's always myth.

—"James Taylor Marked for Death," Lester Bangs

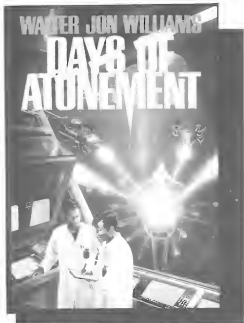
The late critic and recent alternate-universe hero Lester Bangs wasn't responsible for me listening to rock, but he's largely responsible for me fussing too much about it. He made it a way of thinking (thus, life), without sacrificing any intelligence and without covering up the slobbery nature of the beast. This may not be an entirely positive achievement—Bangs was ambivalent about it—but he seemed like a good idea at the time.

Bangs's death affected me more than Elvis's or Sid's: he left no one worthy of handling the obituary. And Bangs had so concentrated, during the last five years of his life, on blowing up the counterculture Death Star that his morose self-snuff seemed a greater betrayal than anything Neil Young or Johnny Rotten were able to come up with in the next decade. It was as if some impossibly cool Han-Luke cross had rushed right into the arms of his big black daddy to start off *Return of the Jedi*, the triumphant five-minute conclusion to the "Star Wars" saga.

When I heard about Bruce Sterling's story, "Dori Bangs," starring Lester Bangs and fellow young corpse Doni Soda, I thought it was a great idea. After all, even if sex and drugs are the usual side-dishes with live rock, geographic isolation and stingy budgets often associate the music with those other bastions of geek revolt, comic books and sf. It

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The Small mining town of Atocha, NM, is about to be dragged kicking and screaming into the future.



Atocha is having trouble coping with the 21st century—Atocha is a place where the old values of family loyalty still hold sway, and where Loren Hawn, the chief of police, can usually solve a crime by knowing everyone and all their secrets.

Out on the edge of town there's a new advanced technology lab, where government scientists are experimenting with the nature of space and time. And on the floor of the police station there's a body—a man full of bullet holes who stumbled in and died in Police Chief Hawn's arms. Hawn's problem: the man had already been killed in a car crash at the turn of the century.

WALTER JON WILLIAMS is the author of *Angel Station*, *Voice of the Whirlwind*, and *Hardwired*. He lives in Albuquerque, NM.

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seems like every other '80s sf novel features a rocker as hero, and it's nice to have someone fass up to Bangs and underground comic influences.

Maybe what we have here is a two-widows-squabbling-over-the-grave situation, but "Doni Bangs" ended up irritating me. Bangs is treated in a way that seems more swiping out of Mom's purse than Killing the Father. And Doni Soda hardly seems there at all; anyway, I didn't get any feeling for her good-natured clear-focused B&W Polaroids of lowlife from Sterling's story.

Not that there's much room for Soda in the prose; in fiction as in life, Bangs takes up space. For starters, his work provides a lot of content of the story, through quotes in the early going: *All My Friends Are Hermies* was indeed Bangs's blanket novel-notes title (you can find some excerpts, which make it look like it would fit pretty slickly in *Semiotext(e) SF* only better, in *Chemical Imbalance*, Vol. 2 #1). The hermits themselves are limned at the opening of "New Year's Eve" (reprinted in *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, edited by Greil Marcus [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987], p. 285), the Spengler companion and "El Cajon" are from the *Psychotic Reactions* introduction, the description of Lester's type of girls from "New Year's Eve" again (*Psychotic Reactions*, p. 290), "Where were you when Elvis died?" from, well, "Where Were You When Elvis Died?" (*Psychotic Reactions*, p. 212), the King's innards from "Notes for a Review of *Last Highway*" (*Psychotic Reactions*, p. 329).

I have a simple question: What am I supposed to make of this? Am I supposed to take it as characterization, that Bangs had a bad habit of reciting himself in bars? Or was I not supposed to recognize it? I understand the use of illustrative quotes in criticism, but in fiction, it smacks confusingly of plagiarism. Don's little single-bar speech (taken from Krystine Kyrrett's tribute in *Weirdo* No. 22) was at least a more-or-less eyewitness account, so I can count it as docudrama, though I'm not into docudrama so I don't know why I'd do that either.

The most offensive aspect of docudrama, its reduction of characters to the size and resolution of a TV screen, is even worse here in "the Land of What Might Have Been" (as Robert Kilheffer calls this sf

subgenre in *NTRSF* #26), where everyone is a celebrity, but all the celebrities have gone through some sort of Warhol-diarization into generic dullards or buffoons. In contrast, rock criticism (School of Bangs) magnifies, even if only in the extent of the aggression it displays (e.g. "Hey Lou, why doncha start shooting speed again! Then you could come up with something good!"—"Dead Mute in a Telephone Booth," *Crans*, Vol. 5, No. 2).

Bangs's narrative failures in "Maggie May" (*Psychotic Reactions*, p. 344) and *Blondie* may rest in the uncharacteristic downscaling of the subjects. Similarly in Sterling's story, Bangs the hero seems diminished next to the blowhard style. It would be a failure if Bangs had written it, and he might as well have, since the blowhard style is Bangs's.

One of his styles, anyway. It's hard to pick up from his literary remains as executed thus far, but Bangs was a master of control, producing scholarly jazz overviews and investigative reportage at the same time as his frothiest ravings. Bangs has this posthumous rep as a *few* avant, but the loust was crazy. His adaptability is something to bear in mind when you deal in what-coulda-beens.

Admittedly, the Boom-Crash-Bangsian style is what we aging cranks usually pull out of our rotting stacks of *Green* and *New York Reader* and *The Village Voice* to pass on younger aging-cranks. It resembles its Beat forefathers and its brother R. Meltzer in its stream-of-semiconsciousness, but it surpasses even them in spunky fecundity. Pick up any copy of *Forrest Expanses* or *Chemical Imbalance*, or dip into pseudopunk net chat, and you'll find a wide spread of ages still doing Lester like there's no tomorrow and no today.

You know, you're soaking in it. It's the Bangs Curse. He's like Nabokov or Demida in reducing critics to parodists. I'm not about to get on Sterling's case for catching the disease, just for how he tries to treat it, with passages like "but when you actually READ a bunch of Lester Bangs Rock Reviews in a row, the whole shebang has a delicate hermetic whiff, like so many eighteenth-century sonnets. It is to dance in chains; it is to see the whole world through a little chrome window of Silva-Thun 'shades . . ." (One of Sterling's nicer pastiches, that, with its Mock-Rational Use of Capital Letters, the slide between slang and

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eccentric discourse and the sunglasses probably borrowed from "Let Us Now Praise Famous Death Dwarves," the first of the Bangs vs. Lou Reed wassail "matches" reprinted in *Psychotic Reactions*.)

The question Sterling brings up here has nagged Bangs-the-original and Bangs-wannabes since the first rush wore off: It's got a good beat and I can dance to it, but is it art? (As far as I'm concerned, the question is clearly answered by its first two clauses, but that's because I'm working off the critical values that Bangs himself used.)

As Sterling says, that first rush is a sense of freedom, the sense that "he can talk about anything, can't he," not that much different from the rush of hearing Elvis Presley or Van Morrison, with the same promise of an infinitely flexible and thoroughly unconscious voice. Bangs achieved it by seamlessly darting through a motley of topics and monologue styles, held together by some assumed shared background (rock music, usually). Music-collecting is the gymnast's bar around which his seemingly weightless twirls and flips are supported. Or, more accurately, given his intended audience and the complexity of his allusive network, it's the jungle gym. The transitions themselves afford the unique Bangsian pleasure.

The hermeticism Sterling mentions is one with the playfulness with which you settle into any web of understood rules, into any clique (that of cyberpunks, for example). In written literature as well as spoken, enjoyment of in-speak can raise a guilty feeling of retreat, of contempt for outsiders. I think this is one of the things a friend was getting at when she said, about Bangs, "The thing is, he seems so immature."

I think Bangs felt it, and tried to break out of the "too cool for you" trap by jettisoning that rock foundation and relying on narrative drive to keep his words stacked together, and they didn't stick. As Sterling says, Bangs's attempts at "straight" fiction are pretty poor, at least what's been printed so far. The more conservative ("Maggie May") is like *romans à clef*, kind of embarrassing, you can't keep raising the stakes and then toss something like that out. The more flipped-out ("All My Friends Are Hermits") holds passages of savage magic (his Jane Fonda solos blow away Ballard's), but flails about helplessly between them.

So, admittedly, traditional narrative interfered with Bangs's 180-degrees-on-a-dime charm. But that's just to say that he had a discursive prose style. Bangs got it to cover a lot of ground (the non-rock pieces for *The Village Voice* were wonderful), and why should he write a novel anyway? Even Mark Twain only really pulled it off once.

The odd thing is that good fiction is spread all through Bangs's discursive writing: autobiographical fiction, a lot of it, something very close to what Sterling is doing, another lot of it. (Take (as Sterling did) Bangs's posthumously-published fantasy of ingesting Elvis Presley's viscera: horror, hilarity, and gonzo tabloidism combine for togetherness speculative nonfiction. Or take the piece that reminds me most of "Dori Bangs," the fantasy biography of Reg Presley, teen idol, spun out in "James Taylor Marked For Death.")

What kept those pieces from being fiction was the structural principle. It's narrative, but only in the way the most experimental

comic and animation remains narrative art. "James Taylor Marked For Death" is structured by something other than the story it tells, by a purported review of a Troglodytes-for-chicks album. Left to its own devices, the story would probably turn out as vague and meandering as Bangs's "fiction." But it didn't, and it deserves a little recognition. Not from the *New York Times*, as Sterling predicts and I admit, but measuring artistic worth by the space one gets in the *New York Times* seems like self-destructive behavior in an artist.

This is where I get to the throbbing nub of "Dori Bangs" 's mosquito bite: "What's the point?" is a question which trickles upstream to its source. If Bangs's aesthetic mission was for next to naught, where's that leave Sterling (or the rest of us)? Sterling wants to steal his cake and diet too. In this story, he's a literary bulimic, and comes across as more truly nihilistic than his slob hero could ever be.

What rock critics have (thanks to Bangs) is the opportunity to speak complexity of simple things (compare Barthes's complex treatment of Balzac's "perfectly clear" prose in *S/Z*, or Delany's of *Diach* in *The American Shore*). What we have in "Dori Bangs" is an attempt to speak simply of something complex; another griddle-related injury; insult is added by the awfully close stylistic relationship between the container and the thing it tries to contain.

I've had similar problems with some other "literary" sf, not to mention speculative mainstream stuff like E. L. Doctorow and John Barth. It's all reference and no lust. I know why I should read *Ulysses* even though *The Odyssey* is in print; I know why I should read *R. Meltzer's* pretty vicious memoir of Bangs ("Lester Bangs Recollected in Tranquility," *Throat Culture* #2) and Bangs's pretty vacant memoir of Vicious ("Bye Bye Sydney," *Throat Culture* #2) and Kyrre's plain pretty memoir of Seda ("Bimbos from Hell," *Waiside* No. 22). They teach me something new, and they touch me. For that matter, I paid full price for Troglodytes albums and forced myself to get used to the flute on Van Morrison's *Astral Voyage* because of the passion Bangs squandered on them, despite all the times his cultural shell game ripped me off.

But I haven't heard of anyone seeking out Bangs or Seda material because of Sterling's story. "Dori Bangs" lacks the lip-smacking which juices the best writing, whether fiction or criticism. Copping attitudes but keeping its distance, and finally throwing in with the big warm family of the intentionally mediocre, it has pity but no passion, and that wouldn't've been enough for Bangs.

I feel for the guy, dragging this monument up over himself 'cause it's cold outside, his big blue feet sticking out . . . I feel the same way, more than I want to. But if Sterling doesn't want to leave indelible graffiti in the concrete sidewalk of Time, then he should just GET OFF THE SIDEWALK. There's a lot to scrawl before it sets.

It doesn't matter. Sterling just bumped an old itch. Today I wrote this banished to cover it up. Tomorrow I'll pull it off, with a bunch of hairs attached. ▶

Ray Davis lives in Nashua, New Hampshire . . . for the moment.

### Dayworld Breakup by Philip José Farmer

New York: Tor Books, 1990; \$18.95 hc; 324 pages

reviewed by Richard Terra

Over the course of a career spanning nearly forty years, Philip José Farmer has developed and amply demonstrated his mastery of both the art and the craft of sf and fantasy writing. On occasion, Farmer has employed this double mastery to produce some important and memorable works. But I suspect that Farmer's popularity among the majority of sf/fantasy readers is due not to his occasional work of lasting importance, but rather to his more voluminous craftwork.

His *Dayworld* series, of which *Dayworld Breakup* is the third volume, is a case in point. It is a solidly crafted set of traditional action and adventure tales, but offers little that is truly innovative. Indeed, the *Dayworld* books are so highly conventional they hark back to an era of sf that predates most of Farmer's own work.

The series (one hesitates to use the word *trilogy*, given Farmer's propensity for serial works) is set in a future some 1400 years hence, in which the world's population is kept "stone d" in a state of suspended animation—six days out of seven. Each day of the week, one seventh of the population awakens to carry on their lives, returning to the stonors

at midnight. The justification for this system is overpopulation; in effect it reduces the population and the demand for resources, utilities and living space by a factor of seven. A benevolent but oppressive and stifling totalitarian government rigidly enforces the system—it is illegal to remain active outside one's assigned weekday.

The first book, *Dayworld* (1985), chronicles a week in the life of one such "daybreaker," Jeff Caird. Caird is a member of a secret subversive group known as "Immerses"—after Caird's grandfather, Gilbert Immerman, who has discovered an anti-aging agent that allows the immerses to remain awake seven days a week without (apparently) aging any faster than their suspended fellow citizens. The immerses aim to use their advantage to gain power and alter the government. Caird acts as a courier between the different days of the weeks, fashioning seven separate identities, one for each "dayworld," to escape detection by the authorities.

Caird is tapped by the Immerses to hunt down a renegade who threatens to expose them all. The cross-week chase is complicated by the

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fact that Caird does not simply act out his separate identities for each day; he dons an entirely new persona and *becomes* that identity. The chase and its pressures break down the barriers between Caird's seven personae, who begin warring with one another for dominance. *Dayworld* ends with Caird's mental breakdown and capture by the world government.

*Dayworld Rebel* (1987) begins with the escape of Caird—who has adopted an entirely new persona, William Duncan—from a government mental hospital. He hooks up with a group of rebellious outlaws, and they become active members in a revolutionary cabal and engage in various conspiracies, barroom brawls and proton-gun battles. *Dayworld Rebel* ends when Caird/Duncan manages to send a message over the world-wide communications net describing the formula for the secret longevity agent and revealing that the world population is no longer an excessive ten billion, but only two billion, and that the government is maintaining the dayworld system only to maintain its totalitarian control.

*Dayworld Breakup* picks up the tale without missing a beat. As the police close in, Caird/Duncan and company flee in a stolen aircraft and succeed in destroying the power supply station for the city of Los Angeles, thus reviving the citizens of all seven days simultaneously, to enormous confusion. After more such exploits, the rebels have caused a world-wide uprising, though it hasn't succeeded in toppling the government. So they travel to Geneva (the world capital), chain themselves to a monument of the founder of the world state, and trumpet their case over the world media net as the police close in.

Back in the state hospital, Caird adopts yet another completely new persona, Baker No Wiley, who is reformed as a model citizen and released. The final half of *Dayworld Breakup* concerns itself with Caird/Wiley's search for the roots of his own identity. He goes underground again to lead a new band of rebels . . . Farmer leaves himself plenty of room to continue the series.

The Dayworld books are an expansion of one of Farmer's short stories from the early 1970s, "The Sliced-Crosswise Only-on-Tuesday World." It is a brief, affecting tale of a Tuesday-world resident who falls in love with the stonered image of a Wednesday-world woman. The story is a tightly-woven unfolding of his obsession and his attempts to secure permission to transfer to Wednesday. He succeeds, only to discover that the powerful bureaucrat who assisted him in his move has also secured permission for the woman he loves to move to Tuesday, so that the bureaucrat can woo her himself. It is a curiously poignant tale of hope, obsession and betrayal.

The language of the short story is spare and subtle, under careful control. The action moves unerringly toward the final revelation of the bureaucrat's duplicity, and each element of the story makes an essential contribution toward the tale's emotional effect.

The prose of the Dayworld novels, in contrast, is looser and less carefully controlled, and often less interesting. The books are filled with long, dry passages of bare narrative that read like a film treatment: all summary, without color or interest. They are also marred by some truly huge expository lumps in which Farmer goes overboard explaining the intricacies of the Dayworld society or the actions and motivations of the characters. Caird himself is a strangely monotonous char-

acter, despite his charcoal-on-like ability to assume new personae; though each is supposedly different, their collective behavior is, for the most part, smoothly consistent with a single identity. All this would have been unnecessary in a more carefully crafted work, in which the events and the characters themselves tell the story.

The strongest book in the series is, unfortunately, the first; *Rebel and Breakup* do not stand very well on their own. The story lines of all three are filled with coincidence and convenient circumstance that often seem unnecessarily contrived. Certain plot elements—Caird's periods of confinement in mental hospitals, the multiple attacks on the power stations, and so on—are repeated without subtlety and give the series a sense of being somewhat padded. Indeed, the *Dayworld* books could easily have been constructed as one single novel.

The scientific background for the series is only so much doubletalk, providing a slim basis for the bizarre social milieu in which it is set. But there are some odd gaffes, such as when Farmer describes stoned people and objects as being not only rock hard, but also immensely heavy—but not solid, even though all atomic and molecular motion has ceased. I had trouble seeing how stoning would alter an object's mass but not its temperature. The standard issue weapons are proton guns, yet these particle beam weapons seem not to do much physical damage, being used most often to stun opponents.

Still, these books move well, and are filled with Farmer's trademark wit and playfulness. *Dayworld* presented a colorful panorama of seven distinct worlds for Caird to contend with, but this color fades away to a rather gray monotony in the two sequels. They all fit, without much difficulty, rather neatly into the action/adventure tradition that includes not only much of Farmer's work but runs all the way back through Heinlein, van Vogt, and the mid-century pulps to E. E. Smith, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and H. Rider Haggard. In fact, there's not much in the *Dayworld* series to distinguish it from similar serial adventures that ran in *Amazing* during the 1940s and '50s—as exemplified by Heinlein's "If This Goes On—," "Methuselah's Children," and "Beyond This Horizon." The series is highly conventional craftwork.

Farmer has demonstrated time and again that he is capable of creating not only simple works of craft such as the *Dayworld* books, but interesting and memorable works of art. It's worth making the distinction between art and craft, without making any value judgments about their relative worth. It is not, as some maintain, a question of honesty or seriousness of intent, but rather their relationship to tradition and convention.

Craft is usually the means by which tradition is transmitted, unaltered; it is the maintenance of convention in order to preserve the core of a tradition. This is not to say that craft lacks stylistic originality or inventiveness, but it is intentionally clichéd and repetitive, a careful contrivance to perpetuate the set pattern of convention.

Art is generally taken to have rather different goals, including the transformation of tradition and convention, if only to reinterpret and reinforce them, to foster new insights into the roots and deeper meanings of traditions. Both art and craft are often interpretive. But art is also intended to transcend convention completely, to be innovative rather than inventive. Yet art cannot exist without careful craft, and craft perpetuates emptiness without high standards set by art; one does not

exist without the other, and the line between them is very indistinct.

Farmer's best work has always been daring and innovative, and yet carefully controlled and constructed. His most memorable and influential works include "The Lovers" (in both short story and novel form), his award-winning "Riders of the Purple Wage," *Flesh, To Your Scattered Bodies Go*, *Dark Is the Sun*, and others. He has also demonstrated a remarkable ability to write interesting transformations on some of the most clichéd material of pulp writing, including *A Feast Unknown*, *Tarzan Alive*, *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life*, and *Time's Last Gift*. While certainly not his best short work, "The Slice-Crosswise Only-on-Tuesday World" clearly belongs among Farmer's careful and thoughtful works.

But Farmer has also produced reams of unremarkable craftwork that is fun and immensely readable, but also utterly forgettable. For that is the fate of craftwork: in striving to be more of the same, it remains largely indistinguishable from what has gone before and that which will come after. It's all the more surprising, then, to see the *Dayworld* series praised as Farmer's "best work in years" or, worse yet, "his best!" Such praise is far off the mark, for with *Dayworld*, *Dayworld Rebel*, and *Dayworld Breakup*, Farmer is crafting works that continue a tradition that has been little touched by innovation since the advent of American pulp science fiction.

Richard Terra lives in Seattle, Washington.

## A Perfect Childhood *Pacific Edge* by Kim Stanley Robinson

New York: Tor Books, 1990; \$18.95 hc; 326 pages

reviewed by Tony Daniel

During the 1980s, one of the more interesting debates in sf was between the humanists and the cyberpunks. Most writers who were part of the discussion did not particularly like the distinctions, thinking them too simplistic or vague. Humanists in particular complained that the only thing that characterized them as a group was that each of them had a different ideological agenda from the others, or none at all. Frequently, Kim Stanley Robinson was called a humanist; often he was said to be the prime example of the humanist sf writer.

As a group, the cyberpunks were more coherent, particularly in the early eighties, bouncing back and forth between the partially-silvered mirrors of technological transformation of human consciousness and radical, frequently anarchic, politics, writing with the laser-like fervor of revolutionaries. It was this fervor and ideological consistency that made their work striking in its way, designed as it was to cut into and burn away impure aesthetic and moral assumptions which the cyberpunks believed were rotting away the strong metal of sf proper.

The cyberpunks didn't stick together for long, as the best writers among them scattered like stray photons along individual pathways, distinct, but traceable back to that original blast. Many of the humanists co-opted the better ideas of the cyberpunks, if not their ideals. For a while, the cyberpunk/humanist distinction was useful; now it is only of historical concern. Some may argue that time—the one institution against which all revolts are doomed to failure—took care of the cyberpunks. This is true to an extent, but I think processes more specific to sf were involved.

The flash and brilliance of sf's surface are brought about very much by the winds of culture, the sunlight of technological process. But deeper currents determine the flow of the sf river. Kim Stanley Robinson's latest novel is caught between the two most powerful of these currents, and the fact that *Pacific Edge* does not end up shipwrecked is a testament to Robinson's craft as a writer. The cyberpunk/humanist debate was, I think, a surface swirl brought about by these currents. While that particular discussion is over, the currents remain.

Maybe the best way to make the distinction I'm after is to bring in another writer, Lucius Shepard. Shepard was one writer during the eighties who could not be classified as humanist or cyberpunk. Shepard's stories come from the pulp tradition—lots of cliff-hangers, action, zombies and stuff like that. There is never an agenda within his stories to which the story elements must conform. This would seem to make him a humanist, but look again. Shepard is just as politically radical as the cyberpunks, and many of his stories involve technological transformations that are sufficiently advanced to appear magical to us naive inhabitants of the present. The difference between the cyberpunk ideal and Shepard is that Shepard is concerned with individuality in his characters and settings. When he tries to be political, he becomes so concerned with these aspects of his story that the politics are pretty much subsumed by them.

I'd characterize Connie Willis the same way. And, despite all the rather involved claims he has made about his own work, and his status as an icon of cyberpunk, I'd lump William Gibson in there, too. If Gibson has any ideological system powering his fiction, I cannot figure out what it is.

On the other side of the coin are those who either do not come from or who have rejected the pulp tradition. Or, to be fair, they are writers who have, for one reason or another, become convinced that pulp techniques are bankrupt, that they are only useful for ironic ends. The pulp tradition, for them, is a tool for examining whatever the subject is they are writing on, even if it's the writing itself. Most often the subject is an ideology or a technology. The cyberpunks are carried along by this current, as are overtly feminist writers and technophiles of all stripes.

I want some new labels. Here are some that probably won't stick. Pulpennils and refineries? Individualists and idealists? Mattemakers and formalists? I'll settle for writers and intellectuals. There is a normative as well as a descriptive function to these labels, as you're no doubt well aware. Sf is not the literature of ideas; it is the literature of human reaction to ideas. And reaction is the key word here, for sf most often involves conflict between ideas and human nature. The best stories take this reaction and turn it about to all angles, as if it were a convoluted gem, examining each twisted facet. This is what the pulp tradition is all about. Ideas are means to an end; they can be begged, borrowed, stolen or dreamed up. It doesn't matter. What is important is capturing the precise way particular humans respond when confronted with those ideas. Often, the best stories use old, old ideas.

*Pacific Edge* is at its best when Robinson gives in to the pulp writer, and provides us with good old action writing. It is at its worst when the intellectual takes over and the characters become emblematic productions of his Orange County utopia. For Robinson has returned once again, maybe for the last time, to his old haunts: the Orange County of the twenty-first century. In his first novel, *The Wild Shore*, O. C. was turned back to pasture by a nuclear holocaust, and fenced in by an angry world. In *The Gold Coast*, Robinson gave us O. C. as a dystopia controlled by the evil, ubiquitous military-industrial complex. Now, as if to assuage the pain to us as well as to his characters, we have an ecological utopia stretching from the Pacific Ocean to the Santa Ana mountains, and beyond.

Robinson rejects a steady-state utopia, wisely enough, and gives us one in which human conflict is possible and can be dealt with by the system. The conflict in this instance arises when Alfredo Blair, a "Red" member of the El Modena town council, wants to rezone a local hill so that his company can locate its headquarters atop it. Kevin Claiborne, one of two Greens on the council, opposes the rezoning. The novel is a chronicle of Kevin's attempt to stop this development. Along the way he discovers, and comes to terms with, the complexities of this utopia built by his grandfather's generation.

Tom Barnard, the old sage in the other two O. C. books, is re-incarnated in *Pacific Edge* as Kevin's grandfather. This will be Tom's last appearance, most likely, and he reflects on the craziness of the world he inhabits and his place in it:

We live with strangers. We live with disjunctures; he had never done any of it; just as likely to have been raising bees in some bombed-out forest, or lying flat on his back in an old folks' home, choking for breath. Incarnations, too, no doubt, fol-

lowing other lines. That he had carved out this line to this spot, that the world had spun along to this sage sunlight and the great solitude; impossible to believe. He would never become sane again.

It is Tom, tensely alive through other books, other time lines, who is the most real character in *Pacific Edge*. Tom was one of the principal founders of the new utopia, and he remains active, vital, while the other characters stay undecided too long and let bad things happen to them over and over which they could have prevented. Perhaps life is like this; perhaps chance and time roll us under like the waves that crush slower fiddler crabs. But at least Tom goes down fighting. Tom claims and forms the book in a way that Kevin's internal structure, or lack thereof, will not permit.

It's because Tom is a pulp hero. He's imperfect, unsure of himself at times, but he doesn't let that stop him from acting. Books in which characters do not act are tedious and beside the point. Throughout most of *Pacific Edge*, the main character, Kevin, only acts when others prompt him to do so and carefully plot the means of action within his trembling hands. One of his only acts of courage is when he confronts the leader of his local Green party and accuses her of not supporting his crusade to stop the development. The numbers he is feeling all along as his lover leaves him to go back to Alfredo the developer, as the development looks like it will proceed despite his best efforts, finally gives him the repose in which to make a decision.

Kevin stared at her. "I see that you're giving up," he said absently. His stomach was contracting to its little knot of wood again. Nothing but scattered images, phrases. He stood up, feeling detached. "We don't have to concede anything to him," he said. "We can fight every one of those issues on their own merits."

"I don't think so."

"I do!" Anger began to flood through him, gushing with every hard knock of his heart.

Yet this decision is, for the most part, nullified, as we come to see Kevin as a cog in the self-regulating machinery of Robinson's utopia, and a redundant part at that. Robinson presents Kevin as an intellectual outgrowth of the utopia, and not a man who must live within it. At the very end, Kevin is almost redeemed by a bout with unhappiness and longing for all that he has lost. He almost becomes human.

But Robinson hasn't built the necessary framework. We feel Kevin's final lament more as the author's bittersweet loss of the setting which he has so lovingly, painfully constructed over three books. Robinson has set out to write a utopia for the last book, and he has done so at the expense of having much of human consequence happen. Only Tom, coming from outside the system, can move us into the ways that stories must move us in order to succeed.

Robinson's utopia is, indeed, intellectually engaging. It is firmly grounded in the principles of European Social Democrats, Greens, and old line American socialists. In a wonderful bit of trickery opening some of the chapters, Robinson has an at-first-unknown writer who is living in a dystopia discuss how one goes about writing a utopia. This narrator finally decides writing one is useless, that trying to make one yourself is all that matters. A discussion of the shortcomings and strengths of Robinson's vision should occupy a completely different review, or a book, for that matter. A few comments here, only as suggestions for further thought.

Everyone in Robinson's utopia seems to be either a professional, a highly skilled craftsman, or a partner in a small service business. I once spent a summer in a small California town with a university as the primary source of income and revenue. It was a wonderful, green place, with strong neighborhoods and lots of environmental and cultural awareness. Robinson's El Modena could be a future version of this city. But what was apparent to anyone coming from the outside, and what the inhabitants seemed, for the most part, blind to, was that this city was situated at the intersection of perfect climate, government money influx and upscale, white American culture. The city's perfection required massive amounts of sacrifice from the rest of us unfortunate. It was not a rule for other cities to follow; it was an exception created

by a kind of unconscious exploitation on the part of the citizens. I cannot see, in the means which Robinson presents for creating his utopia, any reason why it would not result in the same kind of imbalances and hard use of some unfortunate culture or individuals. Present day Scandinavia, for example, seems to me a bigger version of my small California town. Where is all the heavy, polluting industry necessary for high standards of living and technological progress? Where is the seething mixture of cultures which periodically destroy most of the world, but sometimes remake it for the better? Somebody else's problem. But they'll gladly take the benefits.

I am obviously not a Social Democrat and this discussion could go on for pages. Suffice it to say here that Robinson's painting of utopia is beautiful from a distance, but when you get up close you see that the surface is riddled with cracks. And the means by which Robinson suggests this utopia was brought about, through a sort of lawyers' cabal, seems to me both anti-democratic and sinister.

The problem is not the stripe of Robinson's politics, however, but the fact that he lets the politics become the main character of his book. He flirts dangerously with becoming an intellectual writing down ideas rather than a writer telling a story. Long quotes of expository material would support this point, but then lots of off his sizeable benign lumps of the same sort. The difference is in the characters. Following Kevin through his world is like watching a suave but empty promotional piece for some California city on the make. Only, in this case, Robinson wants most everybody to move away, especially if they run businesses that employ more than ten people. At one point, his interstitial narrator comments:

... the future will judge us! They will look back and judge us, as aristocrat's refuge or emerging utopia; and I want utopia, I want that redemption so I'm going to stay here and fight for it, because I was there and I lived it and I know. It was a perfect childhood.

Childhood is indeed a time filled with ideals and lofty plans. And children cannot write good fiction, because to write fiction you have to have lived and come to understand the mysterious turnings and irrational longings of your own heart, and those of your fellow man. A writer cannot forget what it was to be a child, but he has to temper that understanding with adult concerns out here in the grimy, uncooperative world. Intellectuals think like adults, but feel like children. They do not love individuals as they are, but as they should be. They love the idea of what humanity can become rather than the actual people who compose it. At times Robinson falls into this trap.

Nevertheless, *Pacific Edge* succeeds. Mostly this is due to the remarkable character of Tom Bamard and to Robinson's even more remarkable skill with the English language. Even Robinson's infatuation with onomatopoeia has its place in the narrative.

Tom is a human being. He has worked for his utopia, then he finds his life devastated from a completely unrelated direction when his wife dies. The great solitude he inhabits at the beginning of the book is hollow and human enough to swallow any utopia and have room to spare. Kevin's most heroic act is not to oppose the development of Rattlesnake Hill, but to bring his grandfather in out of the great solitude, to give him something to hang onto in the real world once again. Kevin's moment of fullest realization is when he discovers that life is imperfect, even in utopia, that this world is hard on the soft, important things, like affections, caring, love.

Stubbom stuff, this world. A chunk of rock about the size of two softballs was wedged between boulders, and he freed it for use as a hammer. Hammer and chisel, he could write something, leave his mark on the world. All of a sudden he wanted to cut something deep and permanent, something like I, Kevin Claiborne, was here in October of 2065 with oceans of clouds in the sky and in me, and I am bursting with them and everything has gone wrong! The granite being what it was, he contented himself with KC.

Tony Daniel lives on Vashon Island, Washington.



## The Cloud-Sculptor of Terminal X

Continued from page 1

before, as independent approaches to the reality problem; much would happen in the remainder of the decades to assault the barriers and Ballard was not the least of those effects but at the time of which we are obsessed, there were science fiction writers still and there were writers and they had relatively little to do with one another: consider a post-apocalyptic world Ballard said and consider that it will be as rich, as entertaining, as filled with possibilities that world which we think of as "before the disaster." More filled with possibility! For heavens, heavens, if the bomb fell, if the aliens sucked dead the planet, if we blew out the oceans and every head of state, if we fornicated ourselves into biological disaster . . . if any or all of these things happened we were freed at last of the shackles of the 20th century, we were released to a land where because anything *had* happened, anything could. Striding the terminal beach, peering through the wreckage, examining the detritus for signs of passage, the survivor had become, miraculously, the witness and at last the commentator. After the ooze of the soft watches, then, the imprint of chronology in the sands. The biology of the giant, his enormous hands, abscessed features, eyebrows like mountains, knees like the pilings of the *Pygmalion* . . . here was a land, the exploration of whom could keep a platoon of scientists or research assistants cheerfully occupied for huge spans of timeless time, there was an energy and a sense of liberation to these aftermaths which the swaddling technology of the century had itself denied.

Because that was the answer, that was the essence of the Ballard insight: Technology, the evolved state of the planet, was merely a toy, a dream, a rest, a means of concealment; strip it away, get beyond it, turn that technology against itself to rend small or larger holes in the canvas and one could get a look at the true circumstance. "It is not a gloomy poem," Allen Tate says of Emily Dickinson's most famous work. "It merely takes a look at the situation." Ballard gave us a good look at the situation. Energized by disaster as they could never be by the concealments of their condition, his protagonists scampered through the ruins, glowing, learning.

The Actress's Limbs Enormous, Floating, the Planes of Her Face the Landscape of Our Regard. Past the disaster novel then and the profound investigations implied by "The Terminal Beach" came those "compressed novels" of the late sixties, compiled into *The Atrocity Exhibition*. The landscape had been admired and evaluated, the first scuttling procedures had been investigated, but it was left to the compressed novels to take compass and pickaxe, dig through the acknowledged, passive evidence of the disaster and slowly, slowly draw the generating lines. Tallis, Talbot, Travers, Travis, the one and several protagonists of the compressed novels, working their way through some kind of institutional maze to the purer, lustrous villages in the distance laid out the geometry for themselves carefully. Gigantic, synthesized, the torso of Marilyn Monroe floated in the discolored sky, the monumental failure of our own necessity reaching, then subsiding, plunging into the sands to form refractory commentary upon that enlarged and desperate mask of our necessity: Reagan, Kennedy, Connally, icon, all of them shadowed against the sands. Were they "real" or were they the dreams of Marilyn Monroe floating so tenderly, so wistfully beyond us? Were we ourselves "real" in our witness or had we merely been created by the apparatus of the state to mark its downfall? These were large questions, not inconsiderable at a time when questions themselves were the politics of the time. Can we live? Shall we die? Did we kill? Did we dream? Should we or should we not? The questions were killing us and in order to deal with them we gave them names and sometimes attribution, we called them "demonstrators" or "Vietnamese" or "politicians" or "hawks" or "doves" or "hippies." It is important to understand, to the degree that we can be granted any understanding of that time that it seemed to be on the verge of disassembly, *everything* which had seemed the constant was dripping into the pastel and liquefying colors of the Dali watches and the landscape which Ballard was articulating in those compressed novels seemed to be the one true paradigm of what was happening in what we called "reality." There is no way to describe the late sixties in America outside of *The Atrocity Exhibition*, it was all folding up from inside, huge masks of deceased heads of state and their

assassins were unfurling in public squares from Arlington, Virginia to a certain ballroom in Los Angeles and there seemed to be no clear point of focus, certainly no point of disengagement.

Like the man with the lever, we might have moved the world if we had had a place to stand but the only such place was the Moon and we were raining debris upon it with fury, scampering hippy-hop! across its pitted and riven surfaces, the surfaces of the Terminal Beach to be sure, we had converted the Moon into only one more aspect of public policy and surely this was not the answer. 240,000 miles, nearly a quarter of a million miles from the White House, the enormous, distended form of the Actress, her limbs floating in the wake of the Apollos, the planes of her face, the landscape of our regard. Wakeup calls to space, from space, the enormous, thrusting force of the rockets carrying us to—well, where? to another enactment of Vietnam foreign policy, that was where.

Ballard was pure, clean, almost faultless; in the strange and pristine geometry of his design it was possible to see all of the juxtapositions that the liars in the temple, the Speakers of all the Houses were using their technology so desperately to force us not to see. Rip away the veil, however, and Travis could see her, could see her cool and deadly form entwined in the arms of her lover the President, the two of them banging and banging away at one another in an utter assepsis of conjunction with an extension of three point five millimeters, the hanging gardens of their genitalia thrusting home again and again for us all.

Interpolation Two. *The Atrocity Exhibition*, published in England, was contracted by an American publisher, was printed and set to publish, was then pulped when the publisher himself balked at "Why I Want to Puck Ronald Reagan." Arguments, reason, contracts, all or none of the above were invoked in this difficult year when Cambodia had become one of the stations of the cross and the nation had seemed to become composed only of prisoners, guards and potential prisoners and guards, detainees all. Years later, under the title *Love and Napalm: Export USA* the book was brought out by Grove Press (a different publisher) in this country and some time after that Ronald Reagan was elected President.

His Mouth a Circle of Fire; the Anapest of Limbs. Traditional American science fiction had either ended the world ("The Nightmare," "Dawn of Nothing") or had in its rueful and sentimental way showed us that there was an even better time for those survivors (who would inevitably include us) when all of the landscape had been swept away ("Lot," "Mother to the World," "Dumb Waiter") but it had been given to the rigorous and comical Ballard to show us that there was another alternative: the post-apocalyptic could be dared and it could be mapped and it could simply *keep on coming*, one could experience the grinding, roaring, smashing conflagration over and again and learn to live within it, perhaps even transcend: in the laboratory of *Cruel*, then, the fatal accident was enacted over and again with various replacements of the crucial limbs, the impact of disaster could be contracted from forty-five degrees, sixty degrees, ninety degrees, a hundred and eighty degrees while the pillows and harnesses were adjusted and the careful, detached science faculty peered into that solemn estate. Clamped to the actress then, hurtling down the road at 100 mph, the transmission flat out and screaming, the tires beginning their slow, refusing scuttle, he could feel not merely his soul but his genitalia, his very corpus slowly ascend from the planet, depart from this place of strife and loss and then come back again and again to the momentary circle of consciousness. His mouth a circle of fire in those instants of recovery, the anapest of his limbs clutched and unclutched the floorboards, the actor felt himself Prometheus at some final dawn of light, coming back again and again then to this one stinging moment of desertion until he came to understand that what was being enacted upon him, what Ballard had found, what Ballard in rigor and the refusal of denial had ascertained was the *essential secret of the time* and that secret was that death is not opposed to life, death is not merged with life, no, it was simpler than that, death and life were indistinguishable, two aspects of the same floundering corpus and to know that, to know that the states were fused and therefore arbitrary was at last to be freed from that pointless dualism which had turned the world into bisected doom. Live or die. War or peace. Puck or be fucked. Eat or starve. Rich or poor. Tits or cock. It took a simple man of simple tastes to understand that monotheme was

the first and perhaps the central consideration; that tautology was all, that one worked within a tautology so absolute that the real question was not whether one was living or dead but, rather, *who* one was at this time.

Stalking the Barriers, Patrolling the Night. All of this, at least, seemed clear or clearer at the time; like all great writers (painters, composers, choreographers too but that is a different attack and words, unfortunately, are far too referential; are charged with overtones or common application which force the writer to compete with the debasement of his very medium.) Ballard had made it powerfully simple, absolutely stark and clear; from the black and river surfaces of the Moon to the awful places of Asia which had become in bombardment almost indistinguishable from the targeted swell of nipple in the supine Marilyn Monroe to the clattering shatter of limbs against harness in the crash factory . . . it was all the same, everything had fused into that perfect tautology and to understand one aspect of the disaster, then, was to comprehend all of it. The dead animal lay huge on the grey sands, extruding tendrils and tentacles partially dismembered by the force of the explosion; one could seize the animal *anywhere*, take any of these tentacles and slowly, hand over hand, clamber to the original source, the massive head, the sunken and staring eye. Touch *The Atrocity Exhibition* anywhere, follow Travers or Tallis at any gait, move the corpse against the dunes and one would inevitably come to that large and mishapen head which was the center of the disaster, trace outward from the head then to the tendrils and one could replicate the disaster in assimilable proportion.

Ballard brought the twentieth century home to us then, in small and manageable pieces, a do-it-yourself home kit for apocalypse. Just as Dali had furnished the sands or archways of his buildings with pieces of the larger context, just as Picasso in *Guernica* had taken us down the steps into the cellar of bombardment where the animals shrieked human sounds and the babies cried like animals, just as Dali and Picasso and Anselm in *Ballet Mechanique* had managed to put everything into one place, so Ballard had done it too; in his compressed novels were the lunchboxes from the time and one could slowly unpack to measure every aspect of the pain and denial which had manifested itself as our time. To see the distended features of the actress, to stroke her then was to know our own yearning, to feel our yearning hurled back at us along with the implacable stone flesh of the dead woman, likewise the crags and precipices of Reagan's face, the face of Ronald Reagan confronting the subject at a tilt of some 17 degrees would simulate the places of the Moon into which however casually the astronauts had stepped. One could land upon Ronald Reagan then as Armstrong had stepped upon the Moon and in the hard little spaces of his visage one could take serious steps for mankind. Nothing was apart, we were all a nation of the dead, this and much else lurked within those blood tates, handed over to us in the small, anguished proportions of a dream, with the expressivity of the logical voice of the nightmare. Stalking the barriers, patrolling the night, this wasn't so bad at all, Ballard was saying; if something was

mapped it was already mastered. The dread of the Terminal Beach ebbed as one strolled through its dimensions, the horror of the Crash abated if one placed the pillars and barriers in a certain way and began to investigate how the impact could be applied. The lone assassin, hunched in the Depository, ready to blow a hole in the century, *there* was terrifying, yes, but if one could get upstairs there, if one could kick the cans out of the way, pull down the hastily constructed breakfast, move behind the newspapers and instructions and cleaning rods and soiled clothing to look the assassin clearly into place, one would see a man very much like oneself, perhaps it would be oneself in that high space, another, riddled, overexposed version of the self with whom one could reason and to whom one could pass words of comfort.

"Be reasonable," one might say to the assassin, "after all, it works out pretty much the same in the end, this dualism is only a function of your excitement, in the end you'll all be indistinguishable dust anyway." The assassin would nod, his eyes round and impressed, this was the first time someone had spoken to him man to man and it was an impressive, a soothing experience. "Put it down," one would say, gesturing to the rifle, "give up this demented hope of change, walk out into the light of the beach with me. Smell the roses in the lap of the candidate's wife, hear the cries of children. We will all be better for this." The assassin would nod, smile sweetly, convert the rifle to port arms and come to his feet, a haunted expression on his simple and honest features.

"Do you think it's possible?" the assassin would say, "do you think that one could touch the roses, could hold the roses in one hand?" and one would take the assassin by the hand and say, "Yes, yes, of course it would be possible, come with me," and so to the sudden and blinding light of the downhill motor race, the cries of the crowd high and arching in the air. Hand in hand with the assassin then, walking toward the light, the late twentieth century blooming about us.

Anomaly, Exegesis, Mystification. For who is to say who it is to know? It could yet have worked this way for us; when Tallis was killed, juxtaposed by burns or gunfire, he simply went back and formed the pattern again until it was right. Who is to speak of finality? what is there to be known of endings? If the years of that white and poisoned time taught us anything, they taught us of the lack of inviolability, the infusion and exchange of possibility and so, in the compressed and terrible novels of our lives we have learned—thanks only to Ballard I sometimes think—that revisions if not inevitable at least are in order. Anomaly, exegesis, justification, time, all of this is material of solemnity and force and so as we gather with the researchers in the anteroom, awaiting that next appearance of our beloved, we do so with that sweet and gifted patience which he has given us. I am not speaking here of *Empire of the Sun*. *Empire of the Sun* is something else entirely. I would rather not concretize metaphor or know its antecedents, but I admit—ah, what a product I am of the times of which I speak—that this is almost certainly my own terminal beach. ▴

Barry N. Malabar lives in Teaneck, New Jersey.

**Stations of the Tide by Michael Swanwick**  
New York: William Morrow, 1991; \$18.95 hc; 256 pages  
reviewed by John Clute

Sometimes, reading a novel set in the "future"—as this reviewer once did a while ago, writing in 1977 about *The Opiumist Hotline* by John Varley—sometimes it's worthwhile playing a game with the date of the world depicted in the book. Whatever year the novel claims to be set in, which might be almost any year at all, there is an underlying *real year*—back in 1977 I called it the *real decade*, a term both overlong and vague—which shines through, and the point of the game is to determine the *real year* in which the tale is truly set: any Ray Bradbury story—one might suggest—takes place in something like 1927; any Robert A. Heinlein story written after World War Two is set just as the war started; and Philip K. Dick's *real year* moves only with great anxiety forwards from a classical music store in 1950. The fundamental rules of this naming-the-year game are 1) that no of novel (or for that matter tale at all) can of course *actually* be set in the future; 2) that if authors—depending as they do upon a shared language-of-exploration (an oxymoron itself insufficiently explored), and upon a readership

increasingly inclined to confuse sense of wonder with nostalgia—tend to find the speed of light of the present less easy to approach than do certain rogue singletons of the "mainstream," who walk alone; and 3) that the closer a book comes to the present, the harder it is to write or read or understand. In 1977, John Varley's *real year* was very nearly 1977 (but he stayed there). And in 1990, the *real year* that shines through Michael Swanwick's *Stations of the Tide* at almost the speed of light is 1991. From the fix-up-side of his first novel, *In the Drift* (1985), whose *real year* was Watergate, and the slightly dumpy plotline that dogged the exuberant information-buzz triviale of the very much finer *Vacuum Flowers* (1987), a book which read like a billion bytes dancing in the vertical smile of an Edsel, *Stations of the Tide* is a tour-de-force of metamorphosis and insaturation, a renovation of the parlance of the genre for a new era, a clever read, a wise book.

Like any really good science fiction novel written by an intelligent author at the peak of his craft, *Stations of the Tide* is a byte-dance and

sorting of all the sf protocols we are likely to call up from memory. In a prefatory note, Swanwick acknowledges various predecessors on whom he has done Oedipal riffs—Brian W. Aldiss, C. L. Moore, Dylan Thomas, Ted Hughes, Jamaica Kincaid—and he could have mentioned quite a few more, Algis Budrys and Gene Wolfe for two; but perhaps there is no real need to be explicit, for the book is radiant with the language and moves of the genre-edge; and the thrill of the thing lies in the sense of new things transfiguring the old. The story takes place, for instance, within the frame of a coercive galactic federation of some sort; but to understand the shape and feel of that federation and its artifacts one must envision, not an extremely large high school governed in secret by Our Miss Brooks (my own internal model for *Trantor*), but a theater of memory. Caught within that frame—and chafing under the control of galactic “bureaucrats” who continue to quarantine her from the devastating lure of high technology—is the planet Miranda, long-settled by human stock, and now approaching the climax of its Great Year (as it is writ in Heliocentric). Very soon now, the Ocean will cover much of the land, human societies will retreat into the highlands and quite possibly mutate there; and if there are any indigents left (no one knows for sure), they will soon metamorphose into “winter morph” mode, and live underwater (it is a fate to which many humans aspire). These shapechanging natives, who are called “haunts,” may in fact have learned how to take on human form and pass as human in the low-lying, densely-inhabited, soon-to-be-drowned Creole deltas of the planet (for Miranda is not only Prospero’s island awaiting the tempest of the Great Year, but the home world of *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* [1972] as well); but no one knows, for the haunts live below the narrative surface of *Stations of the Tide* like race memories of the anthropophagy of colonialism, giving the incessant novelty of the tale a constant anchor and ostinato far beneath the data-driven surge of story.

That story—as in *Vacuum Flowers*—is something of a meguffin. Gregorian, a human native of the planet, and built like Caliban, has apparently stolen some proscribed technology, and has gone to ground with this Prometheus Fire in the swarming Creole Tidewater region of his birth. Whenever really found out what that technology was (or if, in fact, it had been stolen). Gregorian is now upsetting the apple cart by appearing in television ads in which he claims to be able to adjust

humans to the great change coming, to make them (in effect) into haunt-like winter morphs: natives. The book now begins. A “bureaucrat”—we are never given his name—descends from the galactic federation’s Puzzle Palace in dark space downwards into exile on Miranda to seek out Gregorian, and the rest of *Stations of the Tide* concentrates upon his attempts, which only initially seem fumbling, to trace both Gregorian and a traitor within the Palace, which is a genuine theater of memory, who has been supplying the natives with vital information. The bureaucrat, whose initial air of stiffness and incompetence proves to be entirely superficial, eventually succeeds in controlling Gregorian/Caliban, and in capping the phallic imperialism of Gregorian’s secret father in orbit; and at novel’s close faces his nearly omniscient suitcase-AI, which is not actually called Ariel, to the elements—by which point it is difficult to know whether we should be calling him Prospero, or perhaps Michaelmas or perhaps both—and in the final pages, the parable of the memory dance, Prospero or Michaelmas, leaps metamorphosing into his final station, the unstrangling sea.

But if the haunts below give weight to the “immanence of the land’s passing,” the meguffin above gives to *Stations of the Tide* a necessary formal impetus, the real heart of the book may well lie in the sense it imparts of the ongoing burden of unfurling itself, for we are drowned by the tale in unveiling data. The book is immensely full. The Puzzle Palace, for instance, is quite simply marvelous, a marriage of the Renaissance theatre of the mind and cyberpunk, in which the memory thespians and frizzes of the 16th century become partials (cf. Greg Bear) of the whole person, and walk. And there is much, much more: the intense, verb-dominated thrust of the language; the intersecting dances of partials and persons, haunts and AIs, plot and epiphany; the intensity of Swanwick’s economy (so utterly different from the peeping-tom wambles of *In the Drift*). But the final reason *Stations of the Tide* seems so wedded to the years we now live is no more than what we’ve been getting at all along. Metamorphic and memorable, *Stations of the Tide* is itself the Puzzle Palace that lies within its heart. It is the outside of the inside of the data of the dance. It is a shape for the knowing we’re going to need. ▲

John Clute lives in London, England, in 1991.

### Carmen Dog by Carol Emshwiller

London: The Women’s Press, 1988; £4.95 tp; 148 pages

San Francisco: Mercury House, 1990; \$15.95 hc, \$9.95 tp; 161 pages

reviewed by Karen Joy Fowler

Pat Murphy, who is currently teaching a class on science fiction for the University of California at Santa Cruz, recently told me the following story. In the opening sessions of her class, they devoted a great deal of time to working out a useful definition of the field. As one exercise, Murphy read excerpts of various works to her students and asked them to vote—inside the field or out? One of the passages she read came from Carol Emshwiller’s new novel *Carmen Dog*.

“How many think this is science fiction?” Murphy asked. Out of a class whose total numbers approximately one hundred and fifty students, five raised their hands. “How many think this is not science fiction?” she asked next. Another five students raised their hands.

There was a long pause and then a new set of hands went up. “How do you spell Emshwiller?” the first of these asked. “What was the name of that book?” asked another. “Where can I get that?” asked a third.

Science fiction is lucky in its affiliation with Carol Emshwiller. Within the field her work occupies the same sort of niche reserved for Howard Waldrop, the I-don’t-know-what-to-call-it-but-it’s-really-strange niche. Like Waldrop, Emshwiller is known primarily as a weird and wonderful short story writer. *Carmen Dog*, her first novel, proves that she can be weird and wonderful at length.

The following passage opens the novel:

“The beast changes to a woman or the woman changes to a beast,” the doctor said. “In her case it is certainly the latter since she has been, on the whole, quite passable as a human

being up to the present moment. There may be hundreds of these creatures already among us. No way to tell for sure how many.”

The husband feigns surprise. Actually, he’s seen more than he’s telling, and right in his own home.

The situation is this: all over the world, there are animals evolving into women and women devolving into animals. The wife referred to in the opening paragraph is slowly turning into a snapping turtle. As her transformation proceeds, more and more of the household and child-care fall to Pooch. Pooch is the family dog, a lovely golden setter, who is in the process of becoming more and more human.

One early hallmark of Pooch’s progress into humanity is the interest of the family therapist in her. Although she cannot yet speak, he deduces from their session together that her toilet training may have been unusually severe. He advises her to do something just for herself every day, buy herself a small gift or enjoy a game of frisbee.

When her snapping-turtle mistress begins to bite the baby, Pooch is afraid she will be blamed. Afraid also for the child’s well-being, she takes the baby and runs away to the big city where she is booked for chasing cars, sent to the pound, and her adventures really begin.

Among the women Pooch encounters are ducks, cats, canals, and a herd of high-heeled cows. Among the men are scientists and sybarites.

There is a touch of Dickens in the episodic plotting of *Carmen Dog*. Every time Pooch escapes from one adventure, she finds herself in

another, more dangerous spot. As she goes from peril to greater peril, the reader begins to read in more and more of a rush.

And Pooch is the perfect Dickens heroine. A dog one minute, a doglike young lady the next, Pooch is faithful, docile, obedient, and absolutely innocent. "Is not virtue, after all said and done, invariably triumphant?" she wonders at one point. "Or is it?" Certainly Pooch suffers more horrors at the hands of Emswiller's villains than Dickens would ever have allowed. Arguably she suffers more pleasures than he would have liked as well.

Through it all, Pooch's good humor remains intact, as does Emswiller's. Pooch suffers many dangers and disappointments, but

there are kindnesses, as well, and these kindnesses come from strangers and enemies as often as they come from friends. The book has an angry edge, but is more funny than angry and is never bitter. The ending is a genuinely loving and hopeful one.

Fans of Emswiller's will be happy to have the chance to stretch the Emswiller reading experience to novel length. Readers who have never read her will find *Carmen Dog* a great place to begin. This wonderful book is like nothing else you will ever read.

Karen Joy Fowler lives in Davis, California.

## Hazel D. Schuler Screed

Samuel R. Delany's "The Life of and Writing" has been a torment to me. I've read and reread it god knows how many times, struggling to discover some non-obvious dynamic (irony, or perhaps parody) that would render it reasonable. From the start I assumed (as I have done for years) that Delany and I basically agree on a few fundamental points, to wit: a) with Condit's observation that all language is metaphor; b) with Wittgenstein's conclusion that language does not "reflect" reality; and c) that fictional texts are sign systems and presentational—gestural, even—not representational. Yet it seems to me that in his attempt to put into play Samuel Johnson's deeply misguided premise he defects not only from the above-named points I would consider cardinal, but even from the supposed lesson he purports to be delivering in his (less than clearly signposted) maze of an essay.

One might wonder why Delany would even bother taking up such a flawed (might I say clichéd?) premise as Johnson's, but since he does one must take at face value his promise to "problematize" the process of reading "the life of writing" as "meaning the way everyday life is reflected in writing," out into "an infinitude of possible relations between world and text, word and world, action and articulation." Taken at face value, the possibilities of such problematization might make play with such an old chestnut instructive, if not fun. But on multiple rereadings I find "infinitude" not merely hyperbolic (as I at first assumed), but downright hypocritical (if not self-deceptive).

"The statistical preponderance makes it almost impossible to say anything else about blacks, women, or gays," Delany writes of clichés. "Again, it's the silences in the discourse: such statements enforce around themselves that give them their ideological contour."

Consider:

*A vast statistical preponderance.*

Begin, first, with the names of Great White Males dropped in the essay (in order of appearance): Samuel Johnson, Shakespeare, Freud, Sophocles, Stendhal, Balzac, Auden, Kafka, Hemingway, Picasso, Bradbury, Lukács, Wittgenstein, Eliot (not, of course, George), Joyce, Nabokov, Baudelaire, Plato, Helms, Mapplethorpe, Aristotle, Kenneth Burke, Hincin, and Copernicus; then add another two males, by proximity included in this Boy's Club, Delany himself and his young, "immensely talented" Clarion protégé; and finally, consider the women in the essay—its sole token (who conveniently does not speak but provides Delany with resonances that hearken back to the essay's lead GWM), Judith Johnson Sherwin, and the object of, respectively, the immensely talented student's frustration and sexist cliché ("Women are lousy drivers"). Yes, unfortunately the silence that determines the "ideological contour" of Delany's essay just about defines me. The explicit statement of the clichés alone is lacking. Keep genteelly implicit, submerged within its subtext, does the cliché undergirding "The Life of and Writing" thereby lose its force?

At what I take to be the heart of the essay, Delany meditates on the "world of art." While he proposes—I cannot believe from the context he means to be facetious—with reference to his exemplary young protégé that it is the scene of silly male vanity (in gussied-up lit-crit parlance, "the poetics of male desire") made pre-eminent, a few paragraphs later he tells us that he has "always preferred to see art as a self-corrective process," a process he considers "constitutes the 'truth effect' of language."

"After all, the world of art is the world in which a young man calls to his beloved, fights for her (or his own) honor against ludicrous odds, and—chastened by defeat and disillusion—looks out over the water, tears and the sea indistinguishable on his face, with new and ineffable knowledge." Assuming Delany is not being ironical here (and I take it he is paying respectful tribute to one of the Grand Master Narratives of Mainstream Western Literature), we must then question whether this can really be "the world of art"—of any world of art?

But for the young hero's "ineffable knowledge" I read self-deception—whether in fiction, or in "real life." And that "ineffable knowledge" would still be just as absurd even had its subject been more faithful to that which it was meant to reflect, i.e., not "everyday life," but another—flawed—mirror: since any construction of reality can be taken as a (human-made) mirror, for not only are there only mirrors and perceptions thereof (since it is impossible to access anything by mirrors of the objects we pursue), but this particular mirrored-effect we all (some of us more than others) want so desperately to believe in is, at base, the most pathetic of illusions: our world is obsessed with.

Imagine if the protagonist were female, and the object of desire male, flirting with other females . . . Or better yet, if the protagonist were female, the object of desire also female and the competition either male or female . . . Hmm. The latter *almost* works for me. Still: "A young woman calls to her beloved, fights for her/his (or her own) honor against ludicrous odds, and—chastened by defeat and disillusion—looks out over the water, tears and the sea indistinguishable on her face, with new and ineffable knowledge." So suppose a young female Clarion student presented Delany (or Heinlein, or Lukács or Auden) with such a story. Would he or they be likely to read it as anything but a trivial case of (hysterical—or frustrated) female fantasizing, fit only for trashy working-class magazines, unworthy of Great Art? Can we really imagine any Great White Male Writer giving the female counterpart of our budding young genius the time of day? But that would be precisely what we would have to do to accept Delany's discussion as "gender neutral" and the presence or absence of women's voices in it irrelevant.

What many (if not most) women will see in such a tale is the silliness of the so-called fragile male ego: our entire reality is organized for propping up—and certainly nothing of aesthetic interest. It is, rather, a statement of the script used incessantly in everything from sitcoms to rock songs to television and magazine ads for selling automobiles, mouthwash and cigarettes (among others). A thoughtful person might be prompted to wonder what—if any—difference can be found in the gestures made in this banal hackneyed tale of male vanity from one medium (say advertising) to another (the brilliant but flawed story by Delany's immensely talented protégé). If Delany believes that aesthetics are ethics, then what possible notion of ethics can he have in mind for this cliché's defining "the world of art"? I repeat: fiction writing is presentational—gestural—rather than representational. Just as mirrors mostly are. Which means we should be asking exactly what kind of gesture such a tale makes (i.e., applying to the tale some of the "self-correction" Delany holds up as an ideal for himself) instead of babbling about "ineffable knowledge."

To complicate matters, in pursuit of the Johnsonian premise Delany throughout makes frequent recourse to the mirror. Now unless one wishes only to play at being Narcissus, a man fascinated with the

House of Mirrors would do well to heed the warning of Luce Irigaray, whose *Speculum of the Other Woman* has stood for the last fifteen years as one of the premiere studies of the specular economy. (N.B.: where Narcissus is to be found, there also must Echo dismembered and invisible be.) "Either 'mirror' has already been defined as inclusive of the object it must mirror," Irigaray reminds us,

or it simply re-determines that object's intrinsic quality by framing it. Or the mirror does not "know" the "object" proposed and has to constitute a general reproducible matrix while reflecting it.

The "extremely talented" story about the "girlfriend" and the "bakers" Delany judged "deeply flawed" has, of course, embedded within it a tale of another mirror, one quite obdurate in refusing to frame the subject as he would wish. In both the story and in life, the "girlfriend" (who is not a girlfriend) fell down on the job, for otherwise the immensely talented young male would have been able to reflect back comfortingly magnified (in an endless process of specularization) a vision of life with an aesthetics (and, therefore, ethics) both mentor and protégé would have been well satisfied with.

"Neutral" silence, Irigaray notes, "allows words and their repetition to be discriminated and separated out and framed."

Mirrors are not supposed to talk back.

Objects (of clichés, of male desire for the most flattering of mirrors) must necessarily be kept silent. (The vast statistical preponderance seems smartly to that.) It is easy to see why many (male) readers get so bent out of shape over the fiction of Joanna Russ; why doctors and executives wax hysterical when assigned a secretary with an education and vocabulary superior to their own; and—most commonly—why men consider it "natural" that wives be their husbands' intellectual inferiors.

[Perhaps we all need reminding that clichés about women, blacks, and gays are simply dominant reality mirrors reflecting back not women, blacks and gays, but complicitly magnified images of men, whites and straights, respectively. (Again: mirrors, like texts, do not represent.) Such that "women are lousy drivers" reflects an image of men excelling at driving; "blacks are lazy and shiftless" reflects the image of whites as industrious and self-disciplined; and "gays are emotionally unstable" projects the image of straights as sane and well-balanced. The chief appeal of cliché, in sum, lies in its power to flatter and reassure those who employ it.]

"Mirrors in 1830, and even more so in Shakespeare's day, tended to be distorted," Delany carefully reminds us. Does he mean us to understand that mirrors—for instance the one he so graciously crafts and holds up for questioning (male) readers to peer into—are less distorted the closer one gets to the present, and almost flawless in these days of precision technology (passing over, of course, the Hubble Telescope)?

The Copernican Revolution may have "succeeded in striking 'humanity' from its place at the center of the Universe," as Delany contends, but let us be clear (as Irigaray takes the time to point out) that one of its most important effects was

in the male imaginary. And by centering man outside himself, it has occasioned above all man's ex-stasis within the transcendental (subject). Rising to a perspective that would dominate the totality, to the vantage point of greatest power, he thus cuts himself off from the bedrock, from his empirical relationship with the matrix that he claims to survey. Exiling himself ever further (toward) where the greatest power lies, he thus becomes the "sun" if it is around him that things turn, a pole of attraction stronger than the "earth" . . . And even as man seeks to rise higher and higher—in his knowledge too—so the ground fractures more and more beneath his feet. "Nature" is forever dodging his projects of representation, of reproduction. And his grasp.

And what, Irigaray wonders, would happen if the "object" started to speak?

And what, we might rephrase the question, if the House of Mirrors framed women (!) who were something more than aesthetically appropriate nodes of specularization? Or if the objects of sexist cliché need not

rely on the utterances of "most people" (i.e., *men*: the only speaking subjects Delany's essay conceives of, where even women writers exist merely to provide "resonances" to the words of GWMs) to correct the statistical imbalance (which cannot, apparently, be accomplished within the body of an essay describing the process)?

"You don't right the imbalance—the inequality—by suppressing the discourse. What you have to do is allow, to encourage, even more: you must intrude new discourse into the area of silence around these statements and broaden the field of truth." Tow, Delany addresses. Tow not being me, or any female speaking subjects (who, after all, have no place in his essay), but members of the Boys Club, preferably of the Great White Mainstream of Western Thought.

"To fight with language—more accurate, more logical, more convincing language."

Right on, man—but apparently only so long as it is spoken by men.

The tale of writing as mirror is an old one. It's a battle women have been fighting for millennia (on the side of correction, of course). When only men are doing the writing, you can be sure (since their notion of ethics, aesthetics and self-correction generally serve only the purposes of specular fetishization) much of it will strike the not totally brainwashed woman reader as unbelievable, improbable, or . . . deeply flawed (aesthetically). (Lacianians keep telling us that there's nothing for women to see in the mirror because they not only cannot speak as subjects but don't even properly exist: perhaps this is really Delany's point?)

"The Life of and Writing" is, you might say, rigged—by "suppression of discourse"—through that vast statistical preponderance. (One can almost hear the *hysterical* whispering between the lines of his patrilineal genealogy.) Given its underlying assumptions, Delany's Clarion protégé had to be male. In the current issue of *Science Fiction Eye* Karen Fowler notes that women never receive mentoring from Clarion instructors, not even when they are clearly more talented than the men chosen for that honor. Delany's essay could probably not have held together within its current ideological contours had the student been female. Similarly, its core cliché would have been threatened had the names of speaking subjects he dropped included (to suggest but a few) Virginia Woolf (whose insights into writing, life and mirrors would undoubtedly sharpen his vision), the other Eliot, Christine de Pizan, Dorothy Richardson, Djuna Barnes, Marguerite Duras, Tillie Olson, Audre Lorde, Joanna Russ (in whose "she did not write it" category of techniques for suppressing women's writing one might reasonably place Delany's essay), or Gayatri C. Spivak (whose insights given our multinational capitalist milieu Delany might conceivably have found more incisive than those of a man whose c.v. has admittedly greater romantic appeal for male academics, yet who is reputed to have shifted his position on this very question in the ideological winds of his situation).

"The Life of and Writing" may be kinder and gentler in its style of presentation, but it essentially confirms Greg Bear's more openly chest-beating metaphor of the Great Gang Bang of Ideas (though Bear, unlike Delany, scorns the Mainstream Mainstream as "wall-flower" wimps not manly enough to take part in the banging). Writing of and Life, its subtext proclaims, are concerns of the Boys' Club alone. Women are fit to be mirrors (provided they reflect men back sufficiently magnified, as Virginia Woolf long ago noted), but do not qualify as writing subjects capable of framing themselves in the mirror of the other. Though clichés bore when they are spoken, we must assume from Delany's example they are appropriate when merely implied, and are for that reason—to the guys, that is—aesthetically tolerable.

And so the silences in Delany's discourse, enforced around his central cliché, prevail, and much more effectively than Greg Bear's chest-beating macho.

P.S. The absence from "Served" of any serious engagement with any of the many Delany essays you've published has not escaped my notice. Have you *never* received any letters challenging such highly contentious pieces? I find I must insist that you not print an abridged (i.e., censored) version of this letter. If you can't (or won't) publish it in its current form, don't publish it at all. ▀

Hazel D. Schuler lives in San Diego, California

## Samuel R. Delany An Anthon

I made this longer than usual, only because I have not the time to make it shorter.

—Blaise Pascal

I agree with most of what Ms. Schuler says above. One of the problems that comes with age, however, is that we have had time to see the extraordinarily effective methods sexism, racism, and homophobia have for healing themselves over a period of a decade or twenty years, when, indeed, we once saw them suffer such staggering attacks that we were sure that they could never, at least in certain circles, be notable problems again.

Such experiences can even drive us to theory. And I wouldn't be surprised if there were aspects of the problem, having to do with the self-reparation potential of conservative conceptual schemas, that I think are worse than Ms. Schuler does.

There are three places where I feel Schuler's argument might be stronger.

First, Dr. Johnson's famous kicking of the rock to prove that the real was the real (what I assume to be "Johnson's deeply misguided premise") was, of course, posed as an argument against Idealism, a metaphysical position holding that what was most important about matter was fundamentally outside the human conceptual schema and that the conceptual schema which we move through at the world was itself illusion. This, as Boswell notes in his discussion with Johnson, is a metaphysical position. And metaphysical positions cannot be reasoned about without recourse to "first truths" or "original principles,"

After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, 'I refute it thus.' This was a stout exemplification of the first truths of *Père Bouffier*, or the original principles of Field and of Beattie; without admitting which, we can no more argue in metaphysics, then we can argue in mathematics without axioms. To me it is not conceivable how Berkeley can be answered by pure reasoning; but I know that the nice and difficult task was to have been undertaken by one of the most luminous minds of the present age, had not politics turned him from calm philosophy aside. What an admirable display of subtlety, united with brilliance, might his contending with Berkeley have afforded us! How must we, when we reflect on the loss of such an intellectual feast, regret that he should be characterized as the man,

'Who born for the universe  
narrow'd his mind,  
And to party gave up what  
was meant for mankind?'

My revered friend walked down with me to the beach, where

by they of Bouffier, Reid, Beattie, or whoever—principles that function as do axioms in mathematics, i.e., they posit given (i.e. non-provable) elements or processes that are taken to exist outside our conceptual schema/world/reality.

It doesn't matter what is posited as the ontological bedrock outside that conceptual schema/world/reality: idea, Godhead, energy, or the soul (a subject)—the metaphysical choices which ground various forms of Idealism; or provability, relationship, time, energy, or matter (an object)—the metaphysical choices which ground various forms of materialism. Regardless of which we believe exists over and above any access to it by means of the conceptual schema of the world we actually and socially have, it (or they) force the conceptual schema to become, against that choice, only a more or less inaccurate, fallen, or illusory imitation/account of the metaphysical sub-/super-/structure. The various metaphysics implied by these choices produce everything from Platonism to positivism to scientism. But metaphysical arguments, because they take as their objects of inquiry what is *outside* our conceptual schema, what *grounds* that schema, can't be argued with from *within* the conceptual schema—as Boswell and Johnson both knew. And it is no accident that Boswell specifically states that it was Johnson's interest in "politics" that had turned Dr. J. aside from

such unresolvable metaphysical arguments.

Now the principles that Schuler appeals to in her opening paragraph seem to move toward the position of the poststructuralist notion, associated with Derrida, that language is arbitrary and that anything we assume to exist outside the arbitrarily constituted conceptual schema that is language forms our metaphysics/transcendentals/religion—an idea I concur with. Derrida, at any rate, says we all have a metaphysics, and precisely at the points where we think we are most free of it, we are most deeply mired in it

and are most critically blind to it. (The only pointed difference between Derrida and Boswell at this philosophical moment is that Derrida has identified the conceptual schema *with* language, in its particular Saussurean version: language is the *arbitrary* conceptual schema.) Derrida's famous catchphrase ament all this: "We are never outside metaphysics"—an idea without which the often iterated assertion that all we can ever see, know, or experience is the arbitrary conceptual schema of language makes little sense. But that poststructuralist idea also presupposes an anti-idealism position just as much as Johnson's kick—since, in that argument, language has its conceptual priority precisely *because* it is social/cultural/political. Thus, it seems to me, unless we suspect transcendentals outside of language-in-this-sense are somehow being appealed to, arguments about whether language is representational or presentational, or whether texts are gestural or realistic, are largely arguments about metaphors (since, as Schuler states, all language is metaphor—no less true for the metaphors of presentation and gesture). And while I think the metaphor of language as a transparent and unmediating window opening on to the real is currently all but useless, the metaphor of language as a mirror—especially when that metaphor is used, as I was using it in "The Life of Writing," to highlight the mirror's reversals and distortions, and to bring out, by use of the mirror, elements of linguistic mediation likely to be overlooked—doesn't particularly bother me.

As Rodolphe Gasché might put it, my topic was the mirror's glass, tain (the silver backing that allows the mirror to take part in the illusion of reproduction), and mathematics, not what we presume the mirror to show. (See *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, Rodolphe Gasché, Harvard University Press, Cambridge: 1986.)

The more radical of the poststructuralist positions say that in transcendental terms there is neither a self nor a real—that is, the self and the real are only a language (i.e., a socio-political) effect. But to say that we have access to no transcendental or ideal reality outside of language and its political dispositions is very different from saying that there exists *only* an ideal reality (and, thus, the socio-political has no priority at all because all we experience as reality is only an illusion)—the latter being an idealist position both Johnson and Derrida, in their different ways, are arguing against. (The conclusions of the older Wittgenstein is a discussion I have to bow out of, through lack of familiarity with his late work. But I note that the younger Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* was quite content with "the picture theory of language"—although I have argued with that position: see "Shadows," §21–§29, in *The Jeweled Hinged Jaw*—an argument with which I still concur.) But if I can so wildly reread, misread, and rewrite Johnson's phrase "The Life of Writing" as I did in my essay, I can't very well argue with Schuler for doing with Johnson's rock what I take to be the same.

The point is, in terms of the argument at hand: To say that what we so often take for a "rock" hard, invariable, and finally transcendental real is actually a manifestation of malleable,

we embraced and parted with tenderness, and engaged to correspond by letters. I said, 'I hope, Sir, you will not forget me in my absence.' Johnson: 'Nay, Sir, it is more likely you should forget me, than that I should forget you.' As the vessel put out to sea, I kept my eyes upon him for a considerable time, while he remained rolling his majestic frame in his usual manner; and at last perceived him walk back into the town, and he disappeared.

—From *Saturday, 6 August 1763* entry in *Life of Johnson* by James Boswell, Oxford University Press, New York: 1965, pp. 333–334.

provisional, changeable and arbitrary language means that when a fictive work asks, by certain signs (such as, in the anecdote I recounted in my essay, the young male writer's claim that his story was "true") to be judged against the world, we are judging language against language—not judging language against something transcendental, even if we think we are. To judge a story well observed or badly observed—or to judge a story scintillating, say, because the male characters are well observed when the female characters are not observed at all (or, even more common, are just not there) is still a matter of codes—*will* of judging language against language. These are situations for which the alternative metaphor "reflection"—alternative to the metaphor "observe," i.e., to attend at a distance, as a good servant does (not only is all language metaphorical, it is also all political)—might still, to some profit, be used. Schuler could have put her argument about what the exclusionary list of Great White Males in my essay "reflects" of the socio-politics of patriarchy, or what she had "observed" in it and of it, and it would—at least for me—have been just as powerful an argument. Also, it probably would be clearer for most of our readers. But such dialogues as Schuler's and mine offer progress in terms of contaminated/uncontaminated terms. And for Schuler, right now, "reflection" is a contaminated term because it suggests purity, transparency, and lack of mediation, often used in the context of a sexist metaphor, whereas for me—because I was discussing the impurities, the distortions, and the mediations constitutive of *all* mirroring (even though the mirror can sometimes fool you into thinking it's a window)—it isn't.

That the statistical preponderance of male writers named in "The Life of and Writing" makes the piece an all but perfect example of what, in its latter half, it purports to decrier is also identified through codes. No argument there. But those names, when they appear in my text, no more reflect some transcendental reality than they do when they appear in Schuler's. Because they can (and do) refer *only* to a *social* code that is itself constituted in its arbitrariness by language (e.g., if the term "female" included not only, as it does, all humans with internal genitalia, but also, just as arbitrarily, all humans who wore glasses, then the code would be different and Schuler's critique could not be articulated in the same way: because my selection would then contain "some" females) is precisely *why* the exclusion is, as Schuler points out, so reprehensible. But this also means I don't think that's where I have broken faith with the presuppositions she cites in her first paragraph, or that I have gone over to sit on Dr. J.'s rock (as Schuler reads it), nursing my sore toe. Even when I wrote that I read the young male writer "you might have a better story if you'd told about what you really saw, what the young woman's relationship to you really was, and how you got upset when you saw her with her two friends," those *really*s are pretty informal. They don't refer to any transcendental reality that somehow escapes the highly arbitrary (in the Saussurean sense) conceptual schema that is our perception of the world—that is one-with-language (and which, true, we sometimes refer to as "the real"). They only refer to the verbally negotiable part of that conceptual schema that the young writer had *already* negotiated with his own words by means of codes (i.e., by means of language) he had *already* shown himself to have had access to.

Second, I don't read Karen Joy Fowler's comments in the fine *SF* Eye piece, where Wendy Council, Lisa Goldstein, and Pat Murphy, as having quite the vector that Schuler takes them to have. But I suspect the main problem is that myriad instructor/student relations exist at Clarion. Fowler's *et al.* were comments about one Clarion. And the particular sort of "sponsoring" spoken of (sending letters or phoning to editors or agents on behalf of students, say) is very rare. Many, many Clarioners go by where no such thing happens at all. It's so rare, I think it would even be reasonable to ask if such letters or calls were actually sent or made by any instructor, male or female, in the Clarion under discussion.

If there was only one case off,

speak for Connie Willis or Amy Stout, who seem in a better position than me, but I don't think I have the kind of influence in the field. I have trouble enough publishing myself. I'm also painfully aware my taste is not representative.

MURPHY: By sponsoring you mean writing letters to send out with a story?

GOLDSTEIN: Or sending out stories for them.

COUNCIL: Or calling their agent and recommending the student, or calling book editors and asking them to give a manuscript special attention.

FOWLER: Taking steps to assure their success in the field.

GOLDSTEIN: At the Clarion I taught, I wanted to help one student, but I couldn't figure out what to do. So what if I tell Gardner that this is a wonderful story? Will he listen to me?

FOWLER: That's the way I feel, too.

MURPHY: But I think he probably would. Maybe this is an instance of men having a greater sense of their own power, correct or not, to feel that they could sell someone else's story for them. I'm glad I've heard this, because I'm going to be teaching at Clarion West this summer, and I will be conscious of it, now. And if I feel strongly about a story, I will send a cover letter. I don't know if it's humility or a more accurate sense of my power, but I do doubt that such a letter could sell a story.

—From "The State of Feminism in Science Fiction: An interview with Pat Murphy, Lisa Goldstein, and Karen Joy Fowler," by Wendy Council, *SF Eye*, August 1990, page 31.

cond, for the pedagogic shock of pointing out to the students that what they're doing is serious. That writer/editor is, unlike the phoner/letter-writer, putting her or his own reputation on the line: if enough people decide that the editor is only playing games by purchasing poor-quality student stories, that editor is not going to be asked to edit again. And though showing off or playing games is not ruled out in such a situation, economic pressure still militates for the editor's putting first things first. And such an editor is, at least, not playing with the student's life any more than she or he is playing with her or his own—or with the lives of the other writers s/he buys from.

The pedagogic shock, of course, only dramatizes a point. But whether the point is or isn't dramatized—or dramatized in that particular way—the acuteness is still there. And other instructors have other ways, of course, of making the same point.

Schuler's point and the discussion in the *SF Eye* tetralogue do, however, highlight another problem. Because there are so many ways in which instructors can help students, or become special to a younger writing student, student/instructor relations become very difficult to generalize about and still retain any precision. Schuler uses the terms "mentor" and "protégé," for instance, which Council, Fowler, Goldstein, and Murphy do not.

it presents real problems in terms of any generalizations that might be drawn from it.

In the twenty-two-odd years I've been teaching (on and off) at Clarion, I've never done it. Nor do I think it *should* be done. The closest I've ever come to it is (once) when, some years after a Clarion, a (male) ex-student showed me a novel manuscript, which I encouraged him to submit—and did, indeed, next time by chance I saw the editor, mention that I thought it was a good book. But, of course, other sorts of help are offered at Clarion.

Several times at Clarion, I've encouraged both female and male writing students to submit work to editors. But while I was at the workshop (or shortly afterward) I certainly wouldn't write such a note or make such a phone call. A writer who does is showing off to his (or her) students. And I should think it's much better for a young writer to know that a story was accepted on its own merit than for that young writer (and that young writer's peers!) forever to wonder if the story wasn't finally accepted as a favor to the instructor. If such notes or phone calls get made at Clarion, *all* the students have a right to resent them—especially if the notes get taken. The doubt those notes and calls must cast over the story's quality just isn't the best way to launch anyone's career—especially that of a talented writer. But I'm sure many other Clarion instructors, male and female, feel as I do—which is probably one reason why such notes and calls are as rare as they are.

This is not, incidentally, at all the same as an editor/instructor (who, indeed, may also be a writer) who *buys* a story at Clarion, first, because she or he likes it, and, second, for the pedagogic shock of pointing out to the students that what they're doing is serious. That writer/editor is, unlike the phoner/letter-writer, putting her or his own reputation on the line: if enough people decide that the editor is only playing games by purchasing poor-quality student stories, that editor is not going to be asked to edit again. And though showing off or playing games is not ruled out in such a situation, economic pressure still militates for the editor's putting first things first. And such an editor is, at least, not playing with the student's life any more than she or he is playing with her or his own—or with the lives of the other writers s/he buys from.

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I'll only mention that when, personally, I think of a mentor/protege relation from Clarion, the one that comes most strongly to my mind is 23-year-old Octavia Butler, who came, worked, and went on from Clarion as Harlan Ellison's discovery and protégé. The complexities of the problem begin, however, because, especially when the protégé is of a different gender from mentor, the term "protégé" often carries sexual suggestions that it should not—as it certainly shouldn't in the case of Ellison and Butler. These sexual suggestions, however, are likely to make most uncomfortable precisely the people who know sex was not involved, because they observed the particular mentor/protege relation; but that is why, two or three years later, when, say, Butler's reputation began its well-deserved blossoming on its own, this relation was no longer referred to in mentor/protege terms. Indeed, it tended not to be talked of at all, though Butler herself is certainly generous in acknowledging it. Because of this general feeling that the language available is loaded and inadequate to portray accurately the situation, mentoring relations between male writers and female writing students, between female writers and male writing students, and between writers of either sex known to be gay (like myself or Russ) and writing students of the same sex do not persist in the overt and positive Clarion "mythology"—while, very often, relations where sex either is known to have been involved, or has been suspected, *do* persist in the covert Clarion "folklore" (as vaguely uncomfortable feelings). Because of the discomfort factor, only male/male mentor/protege relations, where both males are perceived as safely heterosexual, form a linguistically stable unit—i.e., a relationship that can be spoken of, without the informed speaker having to resort to endless, anxiety-producing qualifications—over any length of time. But this means that neither *my* nor *her* folklore do justice—especially over a period of years—to the range of mentoring relations of many sorts and orders that most definitely flow and flower—and sometimes—go rotten at Clarion.

So many women of writers have taught at Clarion, however (e.g., Merril, Wilhelm, Russ, Le Guin, Goldstein, Kress, Fowler, Klinge, Lynn, Randall, Yarbro, Murphy, McIntyre, Butler, Charnas, McKillip . . . and let me end my non-exhaustive list by mentioning that Clarion West has had a policy, in effect a number of years now, that at least three of its six instructors are *always* women; have they ever had more than three? It certainly wouldn't hurt), that I must believe at least some of these women have done *some* mentoring—and that they have mentored women students.

I've certainly done so. And so have other male instructors.

The problem of talking about these mentorings, however, of analyzing them, of making known their very real (i.e., culture-formed and culture-changing—not transcendental, but political) existences, of critiquing their advantages and disadvantages, as well as the discomforts and difficulties of both the relations and the articulation of the relations, is a real (again, read "political" if you prefer) writerly problem; but I can think of no better group of writers and aspiring writers to tackle it than the Clarion instructors and students.

The general problem with a critique such as Schuler's, that tries to interpret everything in terms of the dominant ideology, is that such a critique, short of active research and concerted seeking out of evidence, is not likely to discover its true object: the way in which subdominant, oppositional, and resistant ideologies function, preserve themselves, protect themselves, and transmit themselves across various social spaces where they work—as they often do at Clarion. (I assume this to be a major lesson of feminist praxis: what women *have* written is far more important than what they haven't written because of men and far more important than men's devaluing what women have written because they *were* women. Similarly, the mentoring relations involving women at Clarion are far more important than the reasons why so many people, men and women, find them uncomfortable or difficult to talk about. Thus a discussion of the latter is only useful if it can lead to a discussion of the former.) And I probably don't need to tell Schuler that it is the multiplicity of codes and their overdetermination (as well as their always-already arbitrary malleability) that allows us to write about things that haven't been written of before—or to consider new evidence in an argument—and still leave Johnson's rock to Johnson.

But back to Clarion:

If not *enough* female mentoring or female protégé goes on at

Clarion, that may well be because the articulation of those relations is not high enough to stabilize them as a Clarion institution; thus, every time a woman enters such a situation at Clarion, either as a student or teacher, she may at times feel as if she has to reinvent the wheel, as it were. By my own observation, however, four times out of five in a mentor/protege relation, whether the protégé be male or female, it is the protégé who has sought out the mentor—often overcoming great resistance on the mentor's part against forming such a relationship. A mentor is rarely a *reward* a young writer gets for being talented; rather it's a *job* certain young writers can occasionally coerce older writers into doing by being likeable first, teachable second, persistent third, and *then* talented—four traits any one of which can easily preclude the other three. The fundamental incompatibility of the four is why it takes so *much* energy for the prospective protégé to juggle them in her or his own personality—more energy, perhaps, than it's worth! And because talent is the last thing a prospective protégé needs, many who achieve protégédom—the vast majority who manage to elicit it in any notable way—usually amount to very little. Still, the lack of discourse about female protégés (and certainly there *was* some in "The Life of and Writing") can discourage a young woman who might get something out of the protégé/mentor relationship from putting out the very great effort that is needed to establish such a relation with the Clarion mentor of her choice, female or male.

Far more important than instructor/student mentorships at Clarion (i.e., a relation between a particular student and a particular instructor that becomes an unusually strong two-way intellectual and/or emotional bond) and far more frequent are the strong relations that develop between students, which often have mentoring (or mutually-mentoring) aspects to them. These relationships, possibly more often between women than between men or than between men and women, are stabilized by the informal Clarion discourse. But they might certainly benefit by some further articulation that puts them in some relation with the range of student/instructor relationships—in which I still feel, when all is said and done, a special mention, unless it develops outside of Clarion, is one of the *least* important factors to a writer's career.

Some of the things that militate against instructors' mentoring at Clarion are: 1) Save for most unusual circumstances (e.g., Knight and Wilhelm as a married couple coming for two weeks), instructors are only at Clarion eight to ten days and are usually working very hard all through them—whereas students, working even harder, are nevertheless there six weeks. 2) Clarion instructors take our job seriously, and that usually involves conscious attention paid to *not* playing favorites once you get there. 3) Part of the Clarion process is that on the day two instructors overlap, there is a conference between them where the previous instructor runs over her or his impressions of the class for the newcomer—both in terms of talent and in terms of personality. A standard trope in this conference is: "So-and-so is very shy [or very socially awkward] but very talented. See what you can do to bring her/him and her/his work forward into the group." One I've never heard or said, though I've occasionally felt it, is: "So-and-so is great to hang out with but can't write for beans." But since such personal likes vary so much, person to person, one makes the gesture, at least, of letting the new instructor find out what falls out for her or him on his or her own. The process both of articulation and reticence is, of course, fillible; there is always bias, always mistake, always disagreement—always overnight. Because there are six instructors, however, there's a lot of margin for correction. But, in general, the networking of instructors pushes for a general equalizing of instructor attention. Still, specific student/instructor friendships (that may or may not involve much intellectual content) do develop.

There is also always racism, sexism, and homophobia—manifested in the writing of the twenty or so students that attend. But there are also always between three and a dozen students who are ready to tackle, loudly and articulately, these problems in the workshop sessions—and there are always a handful of instructors who are willing to support, guide, and mentor such critiques. If there weren't, Clarion would not have interested me nearly as much as it has over the last two decades.

But what about racism, sexism, or homophobia manifested by instructors? Again, having six highly varied instructors is one way to



mitigate some of that—as it is certainly there.

I can only start to answer this by mentioning that the two cases where I developed strong friendships at Clarion with students met there involve one woman and one (white) man. (Several such friendships developed with ex-Clarion students who sought me out months after the workshop; but will proceed to other examples.) In the case of the woman, I was all but lame that year and had to be driven distances of more than a block—and she drove a truck. She volunteered to ferry me about, when needed (dorm and classrooms that year were about half a mile apart); we became friends. In the case of the young man, he was lame—leg in a hip-to-ankle cast. Two days before I was to leave, he broke rather drunkenly into my room through a window at two o'clock in the morning, and we had a rather interesting conversation till after sun-up. When Clarion was over, I became good friends with him and his young wife.

The young man has not published anything professionally nor pursued his writing in recent years, as far as I know.

In three cases, I've known young women's work before Clarion and have actively urged them to attend. All three did. Two have gone on to professional writing careers. But you would have to ask the women involved, or the other students of their years, whether they perceived my friendship as one between protégé and mentor. It's probably not the term I'd choose to characterize those particular friendships—which continue, by the by. But while I'll give anyone who asks information about Clarion, and will try supportively to reflect the enthusiasm level of anyone who lets me know he or she wants to go, I don't believe I've ever actively encouraged a man whose writing I knew to attend who hadn't made it perfectly clear he already wanted to go.

The question must be, does this pattern correlate with all Clarion instructors? Or all male Clarion instructors? Or all gay Clarion instructors? Or all black Clarion instructors? Or all black gay Clarion instructors? Or all black gay male Clarion instructors? But though one might speculate, this could only be ascertained by active, investigative research—and the findings could be explained only by some pretty sensitive (sociological) theory. The lack of that research ultimately hides the workings of what, ideologically, goes on at Clarion, oppositional or otherwise.

Until such research is done, however, any generalization about "what goes on at Clarion" ideologically is all guesswork, all subjective account—certainly material that can raise questions and suggest research; but it cannot predict the answers.

This is probably the place to point out that theory's purpose is not to replace evidence, but rather to alert us to the ways evidence is always being used to support foregone theories: the ways in which evidence is assumed to be transcendental rather than provisional.

When I think of my own mentees, during the pre-women's liberation fifties and early sixties in which I passed between the ages of 16 and 23, I think of three men and two women. The men, Jesse Jackson, Bernard Kay, and Dick Entin—writers and roving minds, all three—tended to be laid-back, non-confrontational, emotionally supportive, ready to discuss pretty much anything I wanted to. The women, Marie Pomsoot and Bobbs Pinkerton—one a fine poet, one a fine editor—were far more intellectually astringent than the men—in the best sense.

The men let me browse in their bookshelves and take home what interested me.

The women picked books I'd never heard of off the shelves and told me, "Take this home and read it!"—Djuna Barnes in the case of Marie, Naomi Mitchison in the case of Bobbs.

The men were ready to feed me if I needed food, or pick up the pieces after whatever emotional disaster I might have just gone careening through.

The women exerted effort on my behalf and changed my life: Marie was personally responsible for my getting a work-study scholarship to The Breadloaf Writer's Conference when I was eighteen. Bobbs first put me in touch with the man who remains my agent today, back when I was twenty-three.

The men, if I adopted an absurd position, would take the time to tease out, carefully, jokingly, gently, what I was probably trying to say—leaving me to contemplate my own idiocy in the gentlest way.

Thus the men I could relax with.

Without being precisely confrontational, the women were always ready to argue if I said something stupid. The women I had to live up to.

And I believe I sought out the company of both equally.

Reading this over, it suggests some sort of yin/yang equipoise that James Tiptree, Jr., in the 1975 "Women in Science Fiction Symposium," was one of the first to call sharply into question for me. Such seemingly innocent oppositions are always hidden hierarchies; someone always comes out notably on the short end of the stick.

But who?

It occurs to me that, today, when I meet bright young men, I tend to act to ward them like the male mentors I had when I was a youngster acted toward me. (I seem to cook for them a lot.) When I meet a bright young woman, I tend to act more like the women who mentored me: we don't eat much, but the conversation is a lot more spunky. And I'm far more likely to take control and suggest firmly: do this, do that, and I'll go do this for you and you respond to it thus.

Is this a gendered pattern? And, if so, of what sort? What are its political ramifications? What are its sociological explanations?

Perhaps, finally, the ones who lose out are the bright young women who don't get the laid-back, emotionally supportive mentoring from either men or other women—which is where I see the action from the *SF Eye* tetralogue moving toward but not quite getting to the point of articulating.

My final point is that at least one section of Schuler's argument hinges on the assumption that a paragraph of mine is "not [italics Schuler's] ironic":

"After all, the world of art is the world in which a young man calls to his beloved, fights for her (or his own) honor against ludicrous odds, and—chastened by defeat and disillusion—looks out over the waters, tears and the sea indistinguishable on his face, with new and ineffable knowledge."

What can I say? "The Life of/and Writing" began as a talk at Con.Diego, and when I spoke this paragraph, the audience laughed—as they did at my mention in the talk of most of the names on my/Schuler's list of Great White Males. I'd hoped and expected they would, since the point of the central anecdote was to poke fun at the absurd masculinist cliché the young man's story was based on—a cliché which, up till that age (sixteen) he had never questioned the adequacy of to represent the truth about him as a male, much less questioned the adequacy of the wholly sexist trope it turned on to represent anything at all about a young woman he happened to have had some feeling for, even if he didn't know her very well. I can't say "ineffable knowledge" with a straight face—much less "beloved." I certainly smiled when I said them in San Diego.

Schuler goes on to suggest some variations here: "Imagine if the protagonist were female, and the object of desire male, flirting with other females . . . Or better yet, if the protagonist were female, the object of desire also female and the competition either male or female . . . Hmm: the latter almost works for me. Still: 'A young woman calls to her beloved, fights for her/his (or her own) honor against ludicrous odds, and—chastened by defeat and disillusion—looks out over the water, tears and the sea indistinguishable on her face, with new and ineffable knowledge.' So suppose a young female Clarion student presented Delany . . . with such a story. Would he be likely to read it as anything but a trivial case of (hysterical—or frustrated) female fantasizing, fit only for trashy working class magazines, unworthy of Great Art?"

I should say here, for the record, that I believe in very good art, running all the way down to very bad art, with many sorts of interesting art at all levels. But I don't believe Great Art exists; and to start speaking of it is to begin tripping around with the transcendental again; along with the ineffable, I too believe there's always an element of self-deception when you uncritically accept any of the three notions—at least until you've made a pretty concerted effort to "eff." But it's the "effing," the raid on the inarticulate, the attempt to write what does not fit into the ordinary modes of discourse, that produces the necessity for self-correction, the oppositional pressure, the energy needed to effect the alterations, micro-element by micro-element, in the overall literary trope to transform it into the equally tropic form

that the writer can codically identify somewhat more (it is not a completable task, as anyone who has tried it has to realize) as the *trope* of truth, and thus achieve some of the "truth-effect" I wrote of. (I *don't* believe ethics is aesthetics, either, by the way; that's what the young Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* believed—but not, for better or for worse, Delany.) But this may be to mute Schuler's considerable irony in her own passage the way, I fear, she may have been monovocalizing mine—and that isn't going to accomplish much.

But if a young Clarion student presented me with any of Schuler's variations (or, indeed, with any version of my own revision of it that I urged the writer to), she (or he) would get a lot more from me than the time of day—as I think she would get from almost any Clarion instructor. Such reversals and revisions are very easy to come up with in fun—and very hard actually to think through as *stories*. Yet such reversals, now gross ones, now subtle ones, are the only way to *start* telling new stories at all. (Not finish; start.) Any writing worth the time to read it must begin with some form of the fundamental reversal: "I'm *not* going to write what the literary hero does; I'm going to write instead about what I do, or Jane does, or Susan does, or Fred does, or Lorette does, or my mother does, or my father does, or my friend does, or the stranger I saw with her shopping cart in the supermarket does. . . ." I get hoarse at Clarion urging students to break out of the clichés they are boxed into by seriously considering just such reversals, larger or smaller. (Forget the ineffable knowledge. Try having your protagonist learn something statable—whether she *actually* states it or not.) Such reversals were the first writerly moves I ever made in my first published writing, and I still believe they're a good place to get going. But other such reversals were the places where Russ, Heinlein, Le Guin, Brunner, Merril started. . . . The paradox, however, is that such reversals *still* belong to art: that's what makes art a *house* of mirrors, rather than a transparent and unmediated window onto some transcendently grounded real. Such a text—such a tale—is a gesture, a gesture *against* the masculinist and sexist plot cliché of the young male writer's "true" tale. And that's why, all else being equal, I would praise the one—and why I chose, however gently, to criticize the other. (With the young—or the sincere of any age—simply to say: "Your piece is sexist."

racist/homophobic claptrap and you ought to go home and take up some intellectually non-taxing job," does not teach much. But I have used equally gentle teaching strategies when presented with racist and homophobic stories, both by women and men.) And while I might, at a particular Clarion, with a particular student, be more interested in one revision than another, that's not because I feel that one is more transcendently or necessarily true than the other, or that it somehow escapes its provisional status of the moment and achieves "Greatness." "Transcendence," "Truth." That is also why, when you're busy looking at one problem, at one set of provisions, someone can come up behind you and say, "Look, these over here are a *lot* more important!"—which is what, fairly and necessarily, Schuler appears to me to be doing. Finally, however, I think it's precisely the fact that such reversals, some of them anyway, *can* say things about the (socially constructed, linguistically constituted) world which the clichés they are parasitic upon can *not* say that confirms my argument that it is context, not content, that controls the ideological reading of a given string of language—a context that has to include how frequently and in what situations an iteration of the same language string shows up. Otherwise, such reversals could not even begin to set anything in motion, could not free *anything* toward greater meaning.

But the reversals have to be multiple, as well as partial, as well as critically and energetically (dis)placed, to *keep* things in motion, which is another "truth-effect" affect. "Truth" outside of a set of codic, provisional, however urgent-seeming choices, like the "Real," I don't believe I've appealed to in anything other than an ironic mode.

Does this mean that "truth" is relative? Not in the least. Does it explain why people *argue* about what is or isn't true? All the time.

I'll wind this up with an anecdote about the same (young, male) writer I wrote of in "The Life of/and Writing." While it has nothing directly to do with Schuler's argument, it may amuse, if not instruct. When, at 19, this young man published his first science fiction novel, *An Apology for Rain* (Doubleday, 1974), because the book centered on a late adolescent female protagonist (who was tall, gangly, white-haired, and smoked lots of cigarettes), and because the young man's

## Read This

Recently read and recommended by *Michael Cadnum*:

Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William Burroughs* (Avon). At first this book seems little more than High Gossip, albeit sleazy and fun. We visit *Tangiers*, the native women putting hexes on the junkie expatriates while *Naked Lunch* evolves and scatters across the bedroom floor. We learn more than we really ever needed to about Burroughs's personality transformations during *coitus*. Everything is stitched in such lurid detail, we feel somehow tattooed with Burroughs's life, imprinted with it. Gradually, though, this book becomes an important biography, the most comprehensive study of a writer's life that I have read in years, certainly the most detailed study of a prose writer's life since Holroyd's biography of Lytton Strachey. Morgan often writes the language of his subject, idiomatic American, and yet always seems both intelligent and compassionate. This book makes most biographies look feeble.

Colin Wilson, *The Midget: A Study of Sexual Outsiders* (Carroll & Graf). Perhaps we read out of voyeuristic desire to know more than we can about what is really going on in the house next door. Colin Wilson is there ahead of us with all the news. I had no idea Byron was so fond of little boys, or that Swinburne—good, *gray* Swinburne—was such a sexual wild man. More High Gossip, the most delicious sort of history, but Wilson gives us some vitamins along with the candy. Imagination, he says, is a kind of drug, and the dynamic

employment of the imagination is a discovery of the Nineteenth Century. Sex crimes were relatively rare in, say, Richard III's day—people couldn't daydream well enough to get into trouble. Wilson is great company as he delivers both entertainment and insight. There is an appalling and entertaining account of the Marquis de Sade—and you thought he wasn't funny—and the most colorful account of authentic necrophilia I've read in a long time. The book comes in a glorious red jacket.

Stead, Bourke and Brothwell, *Lindow Man* (British Museum Publications). More intimate knowledge, this time about one of the most famous corpses of the English-speaking world, found when a backhoe was excavating a bog. The Man was cut in half before the hoo could be halted, but even so his body is a quarry of information. How did the Man die? Were his intercranial goods in fine order, and why, when you stop to think about it, are his teeth black and so widely-spaced? Everything you ever wanted to know about antique tooth enamel and the effect of tannic acid on the human gut is here. There is a tremendous Bog Man literature, detailed and fascinating. Reading such books offers insight into ancient diet, and sometimes ancient murder. Even the ginger-tint of the public hair of many Bog Men has been explained. There are no more secrets.

first name was of an ambiguous gender (Lee, Carol, Vivian, Pat . . . you know the litany), when Theodore Sturgeon reviewed the book most favorably in *The New York Times Book Review*, Sturgeon wrote throughout of " . . . the writer, she . . ." Not notable in itself, still, eventually, in this same review, Sturgeon began to explain that certain books, such as this one, could only be written by women. Certain effects could only be achieved by women writers, for example (Sturgeon went on) a certain presentation of precise and intense anger. The book under his consideration, Sturgeon held, portrayed such quintessentially female anger superbly—as did the way (Sturgeon cited) of Joanna Russ and Josephine Saxton—in a way that only a woman could. Male writers, Sturgeon suggested, were constitutionally incapable of writing about such anger and could only write about blunt rage, a quintessentially male trait—even when they occasionally, clumsily, and obviously attributed it to their women characters.

The same week that Sturgeon's review appeared, James Tiptree, Jr. was revealed to the sf community as Alice Sheldon—and Robert Silverberg's claim, in his introduction to *Warm Worlds and Others*, that Tiptree's stories could only have been written by a man, entered the realm of up-front sf mythology.

In the fifteen-odd years since, whenever I have referred to the one, I have always discussed the other as well. The two are marvelously and mutually illuminative pieces of idiosyncrasy.

But I must also note that while the Silverberg shuffle is today as well known as any "fact" about science fiction, the Sturgeon slip over Jean M. Galloway has been all but forgotten. Consider, however: when women succeed, however briefly, in masquerading as men—George Eliot, George Sand, James Tiptree, Jr.—the deception *must* be marked and remembered: a woman has, however briefly, crossed the power border and made out on the other side. That's dangerous, and threatens the border in such a way that patriarchal culture is always ready to put up a marker and note: here the enemy breached the lines and, for a moment, got in. But by the same move, those markers and memories of male pseudonyms confirm, above all else, that a certain male power (marked by that border) *exists*. After all, by effort, intentions, and deception, certain women were able to mimic it (who was the '50s male critic who wrote, "George Eliot mounts to greatness, but with labored breath"—or do we need to remember him here?) or, in a liberal reading, even achieve it.

The Sturgeon slip is, however, far more dangerous to the existing power structure. And because it is *more* dangerous, it *must* be forgotten—or repressed—to facilitate the same ends for which the marker must be set in place and stabilized in memory when and where women

breach the power line. The Sturgeon slip says that *without* effort, *without* intention, *without* deception on the part of a writer (and there was certainly no intent to deceive: Jean's book jacket bore a photograph of the lanky writer—but Sturgeon reviewed the book in galleys), a male critic, presumably working at the height of his observational powers, has *misread* the power structure. That male power, that men and women both, feminists and feminist sympathizers as well as non-sympathizers and committed sexists, all agree is *there*, was, for a moment, *simply not seen*. It was not in evidence around a man—even for someone who was presumably looking very hard. The border itself became, for a moment, invisible. Could it possibly be, then, that this male power is not even a social construct, but worse, a social phenomenon that can actually be dismantled, a phenomenon that, on any level that we might call "real" (transcendental, or, when the contradictions of all the various social codes, such as this slip itself represents, are resolved into a more elegant, pragmatic, and acceptable code) simply *does not exist* . . . ?

The slip suggests that because the battle has to take place in codic terms, rather than against transcendental powers, there's a good chance of making headway, of making changes. *That's* what the Sturgeon slip suggests—and that's why I think it is so important to remember it along with the Silverberg shuffle.

Schuler's reading list of women writers was warning. (I might add Donna Haraway to it, in her "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries," which organizes much of the argument above.) The only one whose work I could say I'm not familiar with was Christine de Pizan—and I shall try to remedy that. I'm happy for the suggestion. Simply for my personal reading pleasure (*just* because, if you will), I'd likely turn to almost anyone on that list before I would turn to anyone on Schuler's and my joint GWM roster. I'm particularly pleased with Schuler's inclusion of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, which iterates my recommendation of Spivak in the appendix to *Fights from Newbyton* and at the end of the third part of my three-part article on theory in *NYRSP* #8, for April 1989. Spivak's *In Other Worlds* essays and her interviews in *The Post-Colonial Critic* are wonderfully exciting in the ways they open up the problem of Johnson's rock (the problem of the soot toe, its ability to change your mind about things, and by extension of bodily pain in political torture or, indeed, anything citable as lived experience, in a world constituted by language: see Spivak's translation of Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi," included in *In Other Worlds*, for openness) with far greater insight, acuity, and energy than I have been able to write here. ▲

## Beyond All Praises Odd Moonwise by Greer Ilene Gilman

New York: Roc Books, February 1991; \$4.95 pb; 373 pages  
reviewed by Donald G. Keller

Her book seemed more bright than language, overlaid with fleeting, falling images of runic light, leaf-enwoven, a breviary of dreams.

—*Moonwise*, p. 75

About most books one can say, it is like this, or it is like that, if you know such-and-such you will recognize this; but not here. Greer Gilman's publishing debut is that rarest of creatures, a true original.

To say, as I could, that *Moonwise* has faint echoes of George MacDonald, or John Crowley, or Mervyn Peake, or that its surface story is reminiscent of Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* is as much to say that Gene Wolfe's *Book of the New Sun* has echoes of *The Dying Earth* and *Zathura*, with a conventional quest as surface story—i.e. it is to tell the prospective reader little of value.

Reading *Moonwise* is like wandering a Dantesque wood, straight-way lost, while strange familiar visions rise before you at every step. Even the scenes set in what we call consensus reality have a phantasmagorical quality; the dream sequences and mythological events have a hallucinatory vividness an order stranger than that. The book is as successful as any I have ever read at conveying the fluidity and

transitionlessness of dreams: the scenes and landscapes slide one to another almost past notice, and even the border between sleep and waking is blurred. And the way that dreams focus tightly on small pellucid details while all around is vague is *Moonwise's* way as well.

Like all the finest fantasies, the true achievement of *Moonwise* lies in its style. It is a word-drunk book, inspired not by prose writers but by poets, the like of Marvell and Vaughan, Yeats and Hopkins, perhaps Dylan Thomas: there are places where sound appears to run ahead of sense; but the roll and the roll of the wordflow carries the reader on, almost to Joycean territory. Gilman delights in the rare and old-fashioned word, there in the dictionary for the seeking, that is more vivid than contemporary usage; for the most part, however, the style is rooted firmly in the tangibility of the earth.

The water from those leaves she could not spill; the weaving of that flame she could not stir, with breath or hand: that light was crystalline, and she the wavering shadow, fleeting and consumed. Yet to the child's slight breath it swaled, bearing on the air in tongues of unknown language, and was not sundered from its wick. Stone and sky and leaves, the candle

and the lightborn child were—O green and starry, they were one, and all else nothing. (p. 60)

Throughout, the prose is threaded with symbols, just beneath the surface, shining through the fabric of the text like gems, crying Here Lies Meaning, even though the bemused reader cannot, at first, grasp their full import: Gilman has the rare talent of inventing symbols so potent they strike our subconscious well ahead of our rational understanding. As Tolkien has his Two Trees (the silver and the golden) and Le Guin the Thousand-Leaved Tree, so Gilman has the Ship with tree for mast and stars for leaves. Which leads to the work's other wonder. The opening section of Chapter II, "Darkfast," uses these powerful symbols of our earthly experience (add moon and stars, birds, clouds, and dancing) to forge a myth *entirely* of the author's devising: it has no tropes in common with any mythology of which I am aware. Written at the novel's highest and most difficult pitch of language, it could stand alone as an inevitable-seeming, complete story-image (passing C. S. Lewis's test for myth in *An Experiment in Criticism*); but like Dr. Talo's play in *The Claw of the Conciliator*, it reverberates through the entire novel—every event of the plot refers back to its timeless cycle, and is reciprocally informed by its primal power. It also resembles the chapter from the Kesh novel *Dangerous People* in Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* in that we see the world of Gilman's creation from the most indigenous point of view, that of its mythological beings themselves. John Clute has said here, before me, "There is no such thing as a first reading of a Gene Wolfe novel, for at first there is only the Great Woods of the book"; truer yet of *Moonwink*. On subsequent readings (the myth understood, the symbolism come clearer—though not transparent, not denatured by definition), the mythic power of the

narrative may be as much as the reader can stand.

As the power of the prose already is: I read large stretches of the book with my mouth literally hanging open in awe—there are places where the lyricism was so intense I had to put the book down to recover. This is a writer who can describe two people folding up a sheet so it becomes a numinous ritual. And rereading the last few pages (which resonate, oddly, with the opening of Stapledon's *Star Makers*) on my way to work, I was reduced to curling up embarrassed in the corner of the subway, weeping uncontrollably.

It must be said, if it is not already implicit, that this is a difficult book: it cannot be skimmed, the language is too crammed and clogged with visions, sensations, images, to be followed at its but its own slow and steady pace. If it has a flaw not the vice of its virtues, it is structure: the book is halfway through before a plot emerges. There is Adriane, there is Sylvie—fast friends, 'silly sisters'; they have filled notebooks, creating worlds together: then find themselves in one of them, separated. They meet things dreamt of in their philosophies; find one another, and their task; fulfill it, and return. We close with a long, relaxed coda. It is not the most compelling of novelistic shapes, but the language and the myth keep the reader under their spell.

In short, this is a book that readers of your conventional fantasy trilogy are going to find a stumbling-block, but it is exactly the sort of book that shows the shallowness of conventionality. I see it as so singular a work that it is sure to survive; and any reader crying in the commercial wilderness for something truly new is urged to take the plunge and put your trust in the author: I pledge it will not be misplaced. Gilman's seven years' work on *Moonwink* was well-spent, and I am at once eager and patient for her to craft it an equal. ▲

### ***Jurassic Park* by Michael Crichton**

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, November 1990; \$19.95 hc; 400 pages  
reviewed by Richard A. Lupoff

The prolific and multitiered Michael Crichton's newest best-seller combines four major themes—biotechnology, computers, chaos theory and commercial greed—in a can't-lose stew. Since Crichton is himself something of a scientist—he holds a medical degree—and since the book is fairly heavily researched, the reader reasonably expects more from *Jurassic Park* than a reshuffle of familiar sci-fi materials. This expectation is partially met.

John Hammond, elderly, wealthy, and endlessly ambitious, sets out to create a wonderland that will bring delight to his two grandchildren and to all the children of the world. He's going to finance a project whereby dinosaur DNA, extracted from the bodies of multimillion-year-old insects preserved in amber, can be reconstructed. By removing the genetic material from crocodile eggs (encased in artificial protective outer shells) and replacing it with reconstituted dinosaur DNA, the dinosaur DNA can be cloned to create (or re-create) actual, living dinosaurs.

Rather than use this technology for pure science, Hammond buys an island near Costa Rica and constructs Jurassic Park—the world's greatest theme park! The wealthy and privileged of all nations will of course come here with their children to see real live hadrosaurs, pterosaurs, triceratops, and of course good old T. rexes. Once Jurassic Park is a success, replicas will be built in the Azores to draw European tourists and in the western Pacific to lure Japanese and other wealthy Asians.

Now, quick, do you need to read 400 pages to know the plot of this novel? No, you do not. Not if you've been on this planet for longer than fifteen minutes, and especially not if you've seen Michael Crichton's successful film *Westworld*.

In *Westworld* the greedy entrepreneurs built an amusement park staffed with robot gunfighters (among others) who at the crucial moment in the film went wild and began killing tourists.

One need say no more about *Jurassic Park*, except that the park never quite opens. A small advance party are to receive a custom tour of the island. This group includes Dr. Alan Grant, noble paleontologist, and Hammond's two small grandchildren, Timmy and Alexia. Their

hosts include the senescent grandpa, Henry Wu the dinosaur designer, and Ian Malcolm, a Jubal Harshaw-like mathematical curmudgeon.

Very early in the book, in fact even before the action shifts to Jurassic Park, we learn that some small dinosaurs have made their way to the mainland, and are apparently breeding there and attacking small wild critters and humans. Once we get to the island we find this somewhat puzzling, as we are told that only female dinosaurs are permitted to hatch, and that they are irradiated to make them sterile before they are released. Sort of a belt-and-suspenders approach to population control.

Now, an intelligent reader may ask why the proprietors don't set up an all-male population if they're worried about breeding. Should they make a mistake and one female get loose among a bunch of males, and should the irradiation-sterility approach fail, the problem will still be contained and there will be a fair chance of undoing the harm. But even one male in a large population of females can create havoc. Oh, well.

While the plot of *Jurassic Park* is totally predictable, one might hope to find some other virtues in the book. Interesting characters, for instance. But, alas, the characters are totally uninvolved and virtually indistinguishable from one another, except on the most elementary level: old Mr. Hammond is *old*, the two children are *young* (and one is a boy and one is a girl), Henry Wu is *oriental*, another of the staff members is *fat*, and Ian Malcolm *lectures all the time*.

About the only interesting characters in the book are the dinosaurs themselves. Crichton brings them to life better than Henry Wu does. They're quick-moving, social, and intelligent. In fact, they're so intelligent and so interesting that *Jurassic Park* would clearly have been a much better book had Crichton dumped his humans and written a novel about the dinosaurs. Something like Harry Harrison's *West of Eden* and its sequels.

Speaking of Ian Malcolm and his devotion to chaos theory, Crichton's application of this new way of looking at things seems to advance no further than Malcolm's repeated assertions that Jurassic Park can't possibly succeed because unpredictable factors make any

complex, long-term operation impossible. At no point in the book (at least none that this reviewer could find) does anyone raise the issue of "midcourse corrections." Huh.

The literary technique is rather rudimentary, with characters lecturing one another endlessly on computer operations, biotechnology, paleontology, chaos theory and other topics. On occasion, Crichton doesn't bother even with this crude device, and instead simply lectures the reader. We find ourselves tumbling back through time, from the pages of a 1934 *Astounding* *Science* to those of a 1929 *Science* *Wonder Quarterly*.

In the end, as the helicopter gun ships and bombers of the Costa Rican security force (Costa Rica has no army) bomb Jurassic Park back into the stone age, we find ourselves reacquainted in our personal cinema of the mind every dinosaur movie we've ever seen, from the silent *Lost World* to *King Kong*, *Reptileus*, and *Godzilla*.

There are loose ends galore. Remember those little dinos on the Costa Rican mainland, way back at the beginning of the book? They are

apparently completely forgotten (unless Crichton is saving them for a sequel—*Jurassic Park III? Return to Jurassic Park?*). And there is a subplot involving the pterosaurs—flying dinosaurs—that seems to promise much yet delivers almost nothing. And there is another subplot about a competitor of Hammond's who is out to steal the technology of Jurassic Park and do Hammond one better.

Is all of this mere sloppiness on Crichton's part? Or is he concealing his hand?

Well, see the movie. It's already been purchased for a "mere" two million bucks, to be written by Crichton, directed by Spielberg, and backed by Universal.

Jeepers, Crichton put together so much good material about dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*, and yet came out with such a bad book—it's enough to make you weep. ▶

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Richard A. Lupoff lives in Berkeley, California.

## Greg Cox Excerpts from *The Transylvanian Library: A Consumer's Guide to Vampire Fiction*

COWLES, FREDERICK

"The Vampire of Kaldenstein" (*The Night Wind Howls*, 1938: 20 pp.)

"Princess of Darkness (*Dracula's Brood*, 1987: 18 pp.)

Shamelessly derivative imitations of *Dracula*, with the only real question being whether Cowles was copying the novel or the movies. Frankly, the evidence suggests the latter. . . .

Count Ludwig Von Kaldenstein, "The Vampire of . . .," even goes so far as to steal Bela Lugosi's most famous line when he informs his naive English guest that: "I never drink—wine." And the rest of the story is an equally familiar warning against traveling in foreign lands, as yet another tourist finds himself on the menu while spending the night at the nearest castle. (Have you noticed yet the alarming frequency with which terrible things happen to those who go abroad? If not, check out ALEXANDER, ALLAN, BIERCE, BLACKWOOD, CARTER, COOPER, HAWTHORNE, JAMES, KIMBERLY, METCALFE, NISBET, PURTIL, RAVEN, ROBINSON (PHIL.), SAMUELS, SAXON, SCOTT-MONCRIEF, STOKER, TOLSTOY, and

TREMAINE. *Then* think about your vacation plans!)

On a more scientific note, Cowles does attempt to distinguish between true vampires, who have never died, and the transformed, who are mere walking corpses. The real vamps, like Count Ludwig, prove harder to destroy.



If "The Vampire of Kaldenstein" sometimes seems like a remake of the Lugosi film, then "Princess of Darkness," which was written during the Forties but not published until much later, bears a striking resemblance to the 1936 follow-up film, *Dracula's Daughter*. (See DREADSTONE.)

Budapest, 1938: An heroic English diplomat teams up with an old Hungarian occultist to combat the 400-year-old Princess Besenyei of Transylvania. As in the movie, the virile hero and his aged companion trail the villainous vampiress back to her cobweb-draped, wolf-haunted castle. The climax, however, is a good deal grimmer than any Universal

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Picture, which makes "Princess of Darkness" a bit more enjoyable than "Kaldenstein." A third story, "The Horror of Abbot's Grange" (1936) remains among the Unread.



#### BLOCH, ROBERT

- "The Cloak" (*Unknown Worlds*, May 1939: 18 pp.)  
"The Bat is My Brother" (*Weird Tales*, November 1944: 16 pp.)  
"The Bogeyman Will Get You" (*Weird Tales*, March 1946: 14 pp.)  
"Hungarian Rhapsody" (*Fantastic*, June 1958: 11 pp. Pseudonym: Wilson Kane.)  
"The Living Dead" (*Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*, April 1967: 8 pp.)  
"The Yougoslaves" (*Night Cry*, 1985: 21 pp.)

Bloch, another *Weird Tales* regular, has written about nearly every horrific subject known to man: Lovecraftian monsters, pact-with-the-devil, Jack the Ripper, Lizzie Borden, crawling insects, Egyptian curses, knife-wielding motel owners, a homicidal piano, and, yes, even vampires. He is particularly fond of twist endings, with the result that most of his stories exist on the cutting edge between classic horror and awful jokes.

Take "The Cloak," for example. Looking for a Halloween costume, Henderson inadvertently buys a *genuine* vampire's cape, then finds himself cycling people's necks in a whole new way. He struggles successfully to resist the urge, only to discover (fatally) that he hasn't got the only cursed cloak.

A clever idea, but a hokey ending. A movie version, *The House that Dripped Blood*, was more entertaining, due largely to the performances of John Pertwee and Ingrid Pitt.



In "The Bogeyman," a teenage girl has a terrible crush on dark, handsome Philip Ames, until close observation tips her off that he's a vampire. Nobody believes her, of course, and poor Nancy is further humiliated when Philip turns out to have a reflection after all.

So now is everything hunky-dory? Not quite. Philip's no vampire, all right. He's a werewolf!

Although smoothly written, as are all of Bloch's works, this is easily as aggravating as the worst shaggy dog story. Correction: shaggy wolf.



The same can be said of the glibly racy "Hungarian Rhapsody," in which a voluptuous redheaded aristocrat named Helene Esterhazy, given to attracting nude upon a bed of dirt and gold, attracts the attentions of Solly Vincent, a retired gangster. Intent on rape and robbery, Solly comes to a bad end, as does the story: "I wonder what's biting him now?"  
Groan.



"The Living Dead," also known as "Underground," is a somewhat better twist-ending story, in that the outcome follows logically from the basic conceit: that the notorious Count Basca, stalking his victims amidst World War Two, is actually an actor hired to scare peasants away from the French chateau that German agents have turned into their headquarters. The egocentric thespian inevitably gets what he deserves: a stake through the heart.



Close to thirty years later, Bloch is up to his old tricks in "The Yougoslaves." This otherwise evocative horror story draws an old man

into a nocturnal conflict with a band of heartless Gypsy children deep in the bowels of Paris. Then, after more than twenty pages of spooky build-up, the tale ends abruptly with the revelation that the "helpless" old man just flew in from Transylvania!



What about "The Bat is My Brother," you ask? Ah, I saved the best for last. This story, one of the first told from the point of view of a vampire, is my favorite of all Bloch's forays into the field. Perhaps not surprisingly, it's also the scariest.

Despite its unusual narrator, newly risen from the grave and not terribly happy about it, the main chills are provided by another character: the hero's self-appointed mentor. This "nameless one," a mummy-like Undead with delusions of grandeur, is not content to furtively murder in the shadows; he intends to organize a vampire army and reduce mankind to the status of human cattle. Unfortunately (for the friend, that is), his first recruit turns out to be fatally Reluctant.

The plot is a good one, but more important is the writing. This time around, Bloch's stylish prose serves a story rather than a punchline, so that every scene, even the familiar bitings, is vivid and intense.



Bloch has also touched on vampiric themes in at least two screenplays, *The Cat Creature* and the aforementioned *The House that Dripped Blood*.

#### WOOLRICH, CORNELL

"Vampire's Honeymoon" (*Horror Stories*, August 1939: 33 pp.)

On the night of his engagement to his long-time sweetheart, young Dick suddenly walks away to marry a dark-haired stranger who appears, quite literally, out of nowhere. His new bride, a sadistic Creature of Hell named Faustine, keeps all daylong while hubbys wifely wastes away. Not exactly a picture of wedded bliss. . . .

Too late, Dick guesses the truth, but so does his former fiancée, who comes after Faustine with a stake.

Despite an unusually resourceful heroine, this remains a predictable rendition of our old friend, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. The story has also been titled "My Lips Destroy."



#### WILLIAMSON, JACK

*Darker Than You Think* (*Unknown Worlds*, December 1940.  
Reprinted as a novel.)

This old classic ingeniously blends quantum physics with pulp occultism, thereby coming up with a comprehensive "scientific" explanation of such phenomena as witchcraft and werewolves. There's a vampire here too, but not for anything will I reveal who or where it is. That wouldn't be fair.

See also: FARMER, FORTUNE.



#### MILLER, P. SCHUYLER

"Over the River" (*Unknown Worlds*, April 1941: 11 pp.)

If you could look through the eyes of a vampire, especially on the night he first woke to moonlight, what would you see?

It was a strange world. What that other world had been like, before, he did not remember, but this was different. The moonlight flooded it with a pearly mist through which the

## Read This

Recently read and recommended by *Nina Kiriki Hoffman*:

A doctor establishes a psychic connection with the comatose patient she's looking after.

A lively ghost haunts the house a physics professor is buying, and then haunts her.

A writer sees the central character from her series of thriller novels across a restaurant.

A sales rep for a travel company keeps flashing back to a previous life in 19th-century Scotland.

Something wacky is happening at Harlequin Romances.

I just read the first four novels in their new "Dreamscape" line, and in each book a fantastic element is crucial to the plot. The writing isn't half bad either.

*Prince of Dreams*, by Carly Bishop. What was cool about this one was the peppy yet soporific relationship between a comatose guy and his doctor (the guy is in a coma for the first 174 pages out of 252, surely a record for a romance), the characterization, and the elements of Greek culture. Uncol: an extra complication tacked on to make the novel 20 pages longer.

*Earthenwind*, by Rebecca Flanders. Kind of a light-hearted romp, with the moral message that you have to throw out the boring guy you might have settled for when the right ghost comes along. Uncol: the resolution didn't play by the rules.

*Moonspell*, by Regan Forest. This book has an intriguing premise—that a writer discovers she's writing what happens to somebody she doesn't even know. She's writing those James Bond kind of books where her character gets shot by spear

guns, pushed off ski lifts, and so forth, and it's actually all happening to this guy. Once they figure out that she's the cause and he's the effect (rather than her tuning in on what's happening to him and writing about it) she's so noble she doesn't even experiment. Hmm. What's uncool: a clunky and cliché-ridden opening; and the witchcraft used to explain what's happening doesn't lie down and make logical sense. But hey.

*This Time Forever*, by Margaret Chittenden. She works for a travel company. He's a psychotherapist/M.D. who does past life regressions. They knew each other in a previous life. What's cool about this one is, as my friend Kris says, finally the man has a reason for not telling the woman something (i.e., that the man she sees in her regressions is also him) until nearly the end of the book. The woman doesn't believe in all this New Age crap, even while she's regressing, and the guy doesn't want to scare her away. (One monumentally annoying plot device that has cloned itself in many romances is the idea that people withhold information from each other when they could resolve everything with a little talk. They don't talk and they don't talk for pages. Then on page 178 they have a little talk and everything gets resolved.) This book works pretty well overall.

I was cruising the book section of a local supermarket when I spotted one of those real fat books with the words "A Futuristic Romance" bannered about the title. You guys, the revolution is here.

columns of the trees rose like shadowy stalagmites. The light-mist was not from the moon alone; it was a part of this new world and of the things that were in it. Light pulsed through the rough bark of the tree trunks and burned like tiny corpse-candles at the tip of every growing twig. The spruces and balsams were furred with silvery needles of light. A swirling mist of light hung ankle-deep over the forest floor, broken by black islands of rock. Light was in everything in this new world he was in, save only for the rock, and for himself.

Joe Labatie is a vampire, but one unable to understand what he is, or even who he was. Bereft of memory, he is a creature of instinct, finding his way by trial and error through a midnight landscape filled with inexplicable compulsions and dangers. A deadly black fog invariably attacks him wherever water is in motion. A peculiar arrangement of crossed planks causes him pain. The light radiated by the living creates a hunger in him, but none more so than the light of the strangely-familiar household "Over the River."

Although this amnesiac Undead is obviously traditional in his inclinations, Miller's story is not. This may be the first story ever told from the point of view of a vampire, and it still is still one of the most enthralling. The vivid description of the young vampire's sensory experience anticipates much later work; most notably, *Interview with the Vampire*.

Alas, Joe Labatie's rebirth comes to a quick, wooden end.



SIODMAK, CURT  
"Experiment with Evil" (1942: 10 pp.)

The "vampires" in this story are a swarming cloud of tiny, wraith-  
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like elementals who haunt a gloomy Austrian castle, and who would rather suck a man's breath away than drink his blood. An attempt to exorcise these pesky creatures fails disastrously.

Siodmak is really better known for his screenplays, including *Son of Dracula* (1943).



VAN VOGT, A.E.  
"Asylum (*Atounding*, May 1942: 55 pp.)

Jeel and Merla have lived for thousands of years by stealing both blood and lifeforce from other beings. They are also superhumanly strong, possessed of incredible hypnotic powers, and prone to spending large amounts of time in a coma-like state. Vampires? Definitely. But unlike Count Dracula, this pair arrived on Earth by means of an alien spaceship.

As the beautiful-but-deadly Merla explains: "We were among several thousand holiday-makers who were caught in the gravitational pull of a sun, afterward called the Dreegh Sun. Its rays, immensely dangerous to human life, infected us all. It was discovered that only continuous blood transfusions, and the life force of other human beings could save us." Despite this involuntary genesis, these space vampires have long since evolved into Creatures of Hell, preying on less advanced planets while pursued by the implacable forces of Galactic justice. Fortunately, for the sake of us poor Earthlings, the extraterrestrial cavalry arrives just in time, but not before reporter William Leigh comes dangerously close to becoming the Dreeghs' latest repast.

Set a century or so in the future, "Asylum" occasionally shows signs of age (as when the futuristic hero balks at romancing "a dame who's got twice my IQ"). The plot, which successfully blends the twin threats of vampires and alien invasions, has nevertheless proved surprisingly

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durable. See, for instance, *The Space Vampires* by Colin Wilson.

An expanded version of this story was published as "The Proxy  
Intelligence" (*Worlds of If*, October 1968).



BOUCHER, ANTHONY

"They Bite" (*Unknown*, June 1942: 28 pp.)

While spying on a desert military base, nazy Hugh Tallant  
stumbles across the mummified remains of a family of frontier cannibals. The title gives away the ending.

A grisly bit of contemporary horror, but only marginally vampiric.



HOPKINS, ROBERT THURSTON

"The Vampire of Woolpit Grange" (1945: 17 pp.)

Beatrice Springett, a ghost with nasty teeth, may or may not  
occasionally take possession of her milder descendant, Joan, but she  
definitely haunts the home of her long-dead lover, much to the  
misfortune of whomever happens to be living there now.

Despite the title, this is basically a haunted house story with an  
unhappy ending.



## Read This

Continued from page 24

of times, it was the worst of times, it was Tuesday afternoon. [JJO]

*Sandman: The Doll's House* by Neil Gaiman (DC Comics). A graphic  
novel. A powerful, touching episode in the "life" of Dream. A collection  
from the best current comic of any kind. [JJO]

*Science Fiction in the Real World* by Norman Spinrad (Univ. of  
Southern Illinois). The collected Asimov's columns, seemingly  
stronger resonating with one another and several new essays. One of the  
important critical books of the last several decades. [DGK]

*Slow Dancing Through Time* by Gardner Dozois et al. (Ziesing/Ursus).  
Both a collection and an anthology, a creative idea from two of the best  
small press publishers. This is the kind of book small publishers do best,  
and they've done it well here. More, please. [KC]

*Thomas the Rhymer* by Ellen Kashner (William Morrow). A lovely,  
lyrically-written, heartfelt traditional fantasy by the author of the scerbic  
*Swordspoint*. [DGK]

*Voyage to the Red Planet* by Terry Bisson (William Morrow). Holly-  
wood goes to Mars! An interplanetary *tour-de-force*, an sf parody yes,  
but also a social parody done in sf. [JJO]

*The Weird Tale* by S. T. Joshi (University of Texas). It's about time we  
had some serious critical discussion of this generally-ignored form of  
fantastic fiction that, despite the passage of years, still holds an undeni-  
able fascination. Not the final word, but a good start. [RKK]

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## Read This

Recently read and recommended by  
*The New York Review of Science Fiction:*

In our eclectic way we have compiled a list of our favorite titles of 1990 while obeying rules to avoid any conflicts of interest. We can't offer this as a comprehensive list of the year's best books, but we feel these works offer great rewards, and if you haven't read them, we suggest you look them up. Our list of books follows—novels, collections, non-fiction. Next issue will feature our list of short fiction.

*The Brains of Ramsby* by Michael Blumlein (Scream/Press). Intense, focused, unsettling short stories by an unusual talent. Read it for the epiphanies. [DGK]

*Castleview* by Gene Wolfe (Tor). A quick read (as if that matters), a clever and complex piece of work (as if that's a surprise), and the first innovative use of Arthuriana since . . . the Dark Ages? Underrated. [DGK/RKK]

*A Child Across the Sky* by Jonathan Carroll (Doubleday). It's about as easy to find a novel this harrowing as it is to classify Carroll's work. [GVG]

*The Child Garden* by Geoff Ryman (St. Martin's). Winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award, the longest, richest work yet by the past decade's finest new writer. I'm still assimilating it. [DGK]

*The Fall of Hyperion* by Dan Simmons (Doubleday/Foundation). Following up the Hugo-winning, Chaucer-inspired *Hyperion*, this convoluted book starring John Keats commendably completes Simmons's galaxy-spanning epic. Among the plethora of recent novels toying intelligently with all manner of sf tropes, both books stand out as successful marriages of grand spectacle and literary accomplishment. [RKK]

*Heathens* by Jack Womack (Tor). Womack has a diamond-edged view of where we're headed, and the drive of his language takes you there with the force of time itself. This is a book it's easy to fall for. [GVG]

*Her Smoke Rose Up Forever* by James Tiptree, Jr. (Arkham House). Arkham has become the major publisher of short fiction collections in the field, and this one especially stands out as a landmark. Tiptree should not be forgotten, and this book will ensure that she won't. [RKK]

*The Hollow Earth* by Rudy Rucker (William Morrow). A "scientific romance" made of old-school bricks, with modern speculative physics for mortar. [JJO]

*The Motion of Light and Water* by Samuel R. Delany (Grafton/Paladin) and *The Attraction Exhibition* by J.G. Ballard (Re/Search Publications). Two older books in new augmented editions: the Delany autobiography has 100 pages of new material plus a 50-page interview; the Ballard condensed-novel set has fascinating author's annotations plus four more stories. Of their time but up-to-the-minute relevant. [DGK]

*My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist* by Mark Leyner (Harmony). Sharply focused yet unrestrained, it was the best  
*(continued on page 23)*

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